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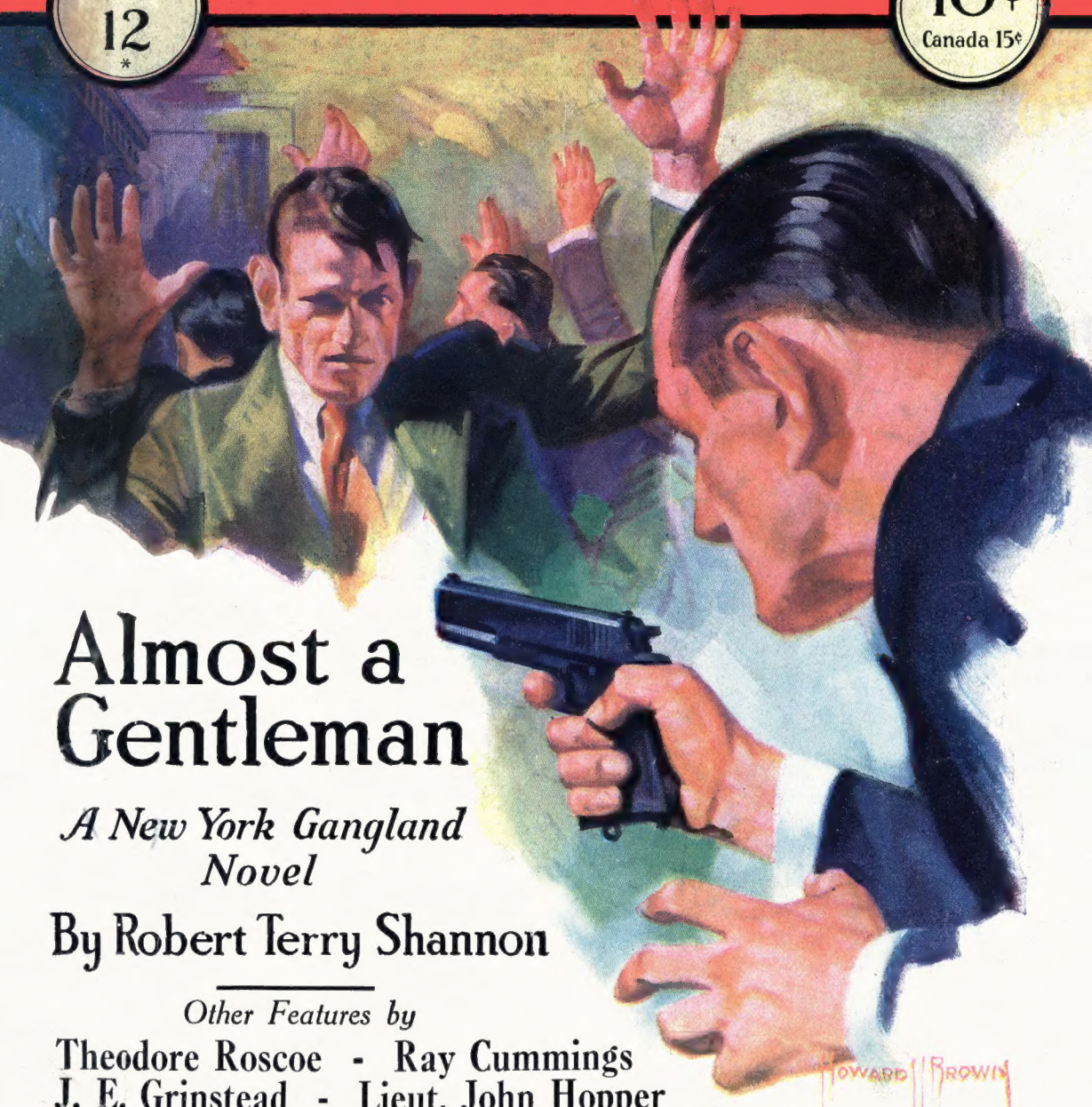


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ISSUED WEEKLY

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Almost a Gentleman

*A New York Gangland
Novel*

By Robert Terry Shannon

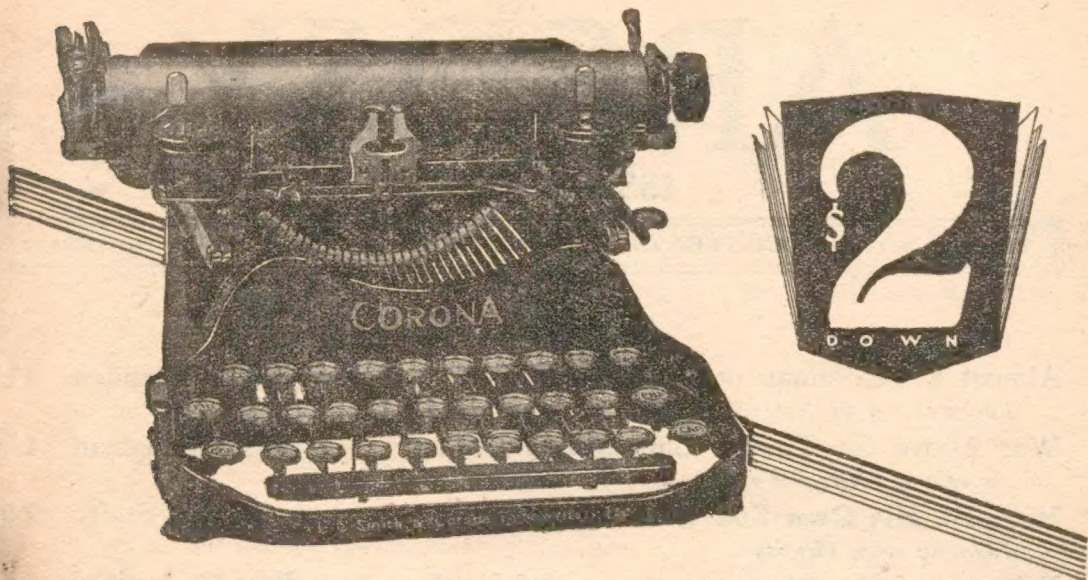
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VOLUME 207

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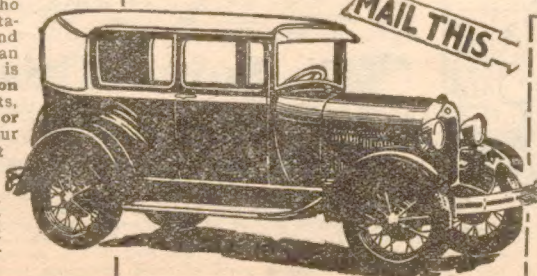
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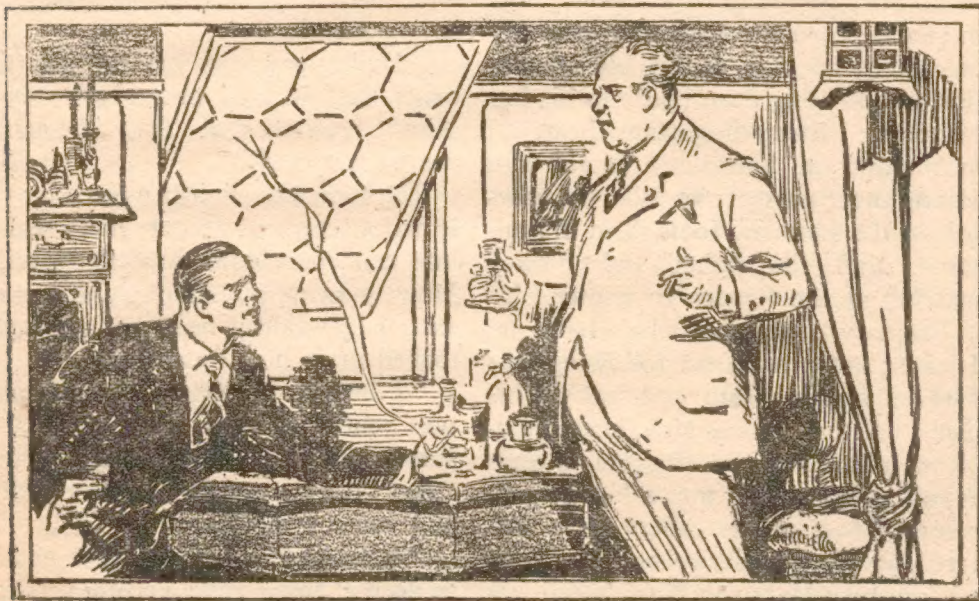
ARGOSY

ISSUED WEEKLY

VOLUME 207

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 12, 1929

NUMBER 2



"So it's a plain gyp, is it?"

Almost a Gentleman

When a young racketeer like Joe Leander runs into people who differ from his straight-shooting but cruel code, nobody can predict what will happen

By ROBERT TERRY SHANNON

Author of "The Resurrection of Red O'Laughlan," "Once in a Lifetime," etc.

CHAPTER I.

SHAKE-DOWN.

THERE was nothing about Harrison Howe, to the casual eye, that connected him with the underworld. He was a comfortable-stomached and amiable man; his face was

roundly pinkish; he was bald and immaculately clothed. In his breast pocket was a figured silk handkerchief and usually he had a carnation in his buttonhole.

A sociable nature was the curse, or perhaps the blessing, of his life. His wife had been a tight-lipped, painfully

righteous woman; fortunately for Harrison Howe's comfort she had died ten years ago. The truth was that, despite a fairly good social background, he was happiest living among a certain colorful type of riff-raff.

For the last ten years—he was now fifty—he had occupied a commodious suite in the Hotel Shenandoah in the West Forties. Most of his money was in rental properties and, so far as any one knew, his only discernible occupation was keeping open house in his hotel rooms. Every important theatrical first night on Broadway found him among those present; he followed baseball in the summer, football in the autumn, and the fights and hockey matches at the Garden in winter.

Properly speaking, he had no friends; but a transient following was forever swirling into and out of his place. Actors, chorus girls, horse gamblers, musicians, bootleggers always found an open door and a hearty welcome. Most of his callers were flattered by his prosperity and his good will; in turn Harrison Howe's ego was warmed and nourished by their vivid personalities. It was the kind of life he enjoyed best and he loved every minute of it.

None of the brutal violence of the underworld touched Howe. His own satellites were neither vicious nor especially dishonest; in fact, like most temperamental people, they were rather naïve and childlike beneath their curbstone wisdom. No, there seemed to be no connection whatever between the amiable Howe and the definite world of crime; certainly Howe himself never gave the idea any thought at all.

At eleven o'clock of one fine winter morning, he sat comfortably at breakfast in his room, still clad in his pyjamas and bath robe. The room-serv-

ice waiter had just left with the check which Howe had signed; the place was warm as summer, while outside the whole air was filled with a feathery white cloud of descending snow.

Having finished his orange juice, Howe attacked his bacon and eggs with the pleasant, sheltered feeling of a man who knows he is immune from the cold and storm. His telephone rang and he went to it.

"Hello—say, are you the guy that owns the piece of property down on Ninth Avenue that Tony Lescabura rented last week?"

The tone was slightly aggressive and it had a tenement accent; these real estate matters seldom came to Harrison Howe personally. Although he was not extremely wealthy, he had an agent who looked after his properties.

"I believe the Ninth Avenue place was rented to some such person," he stated with gentlemanly politeness, "but I'll give you my agent's address and you can inquire—"

"Nix—your agent ain't got nothing to do wit' this. It's a private matter—I better come up and see you myself."

Howe was vaguely annoyed. "Are you the new tenant?"

"Nothing like that, brother. Listen, you better see me, that's the best way. I'll be up your way inside the next hour—that okay?"

It was clearly the duty of O'Brien & O'Brien, the agents, to handle such matters, but Howe was faintly curious. After all, he did own the property. Besides, his eggs were getting cold.

"All right. Come in before noon."

HE hung up the receiver and went back to his breakfast. It was going to be, he imagined, one of those lazy indoor days—a sociable day for friendly visitors, for food and

drink and conversation. It would be nice when the dusk of cocktail hour came around with its laughter and good feeling, with softly glowing lights and a splendid dinner and the theater to follow. Yes, indeed, life was very good to those who knew how to live it.

The waiter took away the breakfast things and Harrison Howe took some calisthenics and a shower—an unusual sequence, but all of his habits were a little strange. He dressed carefully and felt fine. With his Turkish cigarette between his lips, he looked over the morning papers and decided to send out for a new novel he saw advertised. Once more his telephone rang and Larry Gregg, a vaudevillian, bade him good-by; Larry was leaving for a twenty-week tour.

The farewell depressed Howe; he was temperamental himself, and suddenly, he felt as though he was a lonely old man. One of those rare terrifying moods came over him and he saw himself surrounded by parasites who cared only for his liquor and entertainment. A drink, of course, would speedily knock that idea out of his head. The cockles of his heart needed warming—but he hated to take a drink alone.

He looked at his watch and thought hopefully that somebody would probably drop in soon. He had all but forgotten that he was expecting a caller, when somebody knocked at his door.

"Come in!" he boomed grandly, after his habitual manner.

The door opened and a tall, dark-eyed young man with high cheek bones stepped inside. The stranger was wearing a conspicuous gray overcoat; his necktie was a sunburst of orange and green; he removed a rakish felt hat and revealed a black head of hair, oiled and brushed to a polish. Even Harrison Howe, accustomed to the pro-

nounced Broadway styles, sensed an unusual loudness in his visitor's attire.

"I'm the guy that called you up," said the caller.

His eyes roved about the room rapidly, as if from the habit of suspicion amid new surroundings. Howe's ready hospitality came to the surface. He was honestly glad that somebody had dropped in.

"Oh, yes, I've been looking for you. Well, take off your coat and sit down."

Slowly, and there was a certain grace in his movement, the young man got off his coat. The furnishings of the suite belonged to Howe personally and they were rather ornate and expensive; there was the soft richness of mahogany, the luxury of thick rugs and the cheerful lacquered cabinets and deep upholstered chairs. The stranger's eyes lingered on the silk curtains at the windows.

"You got a swell place here, Mr. Howe," he said with a tinge of respect.

"Well, it's comfortable enough for hotel life at any rate," returned Howe, pleased. Obviously, this young man was pleasant enough, even if a bit crude. "Sit down, sit down. I was just going to have a little nip of something myself; may I fix a drink for you?"

His caller sat in a wide chair and seemed surprised at its depth and softness.

"I don't bother the stuff much, but I'll have a light one wit' you."

While Howe busied himself for the moment, Joe Leander waited quietly with a slight mental discomfort; he was disarmed of his hard hostility by the sheer courtesy of Harrison Howe. He was a nice old guy—of a different clay than most of the customers.

"I wonder if he'll squawk much when he gets the bad news?" thought

the young man. It was a pleasure to "put the bee" on lots of people—most of them were gyps themselves anyway. But this Howe guy seemed regular.

"Fine day outside, isn't it?" Harrison Howe remarked agreeably.

It was a rotten day out, but Joe Leander wanted to be polite, too. "Yeah, it's a fine day."

SOMETHING in the young man's breast expanded and he was conscious of a vague, yearning affinity with this pleasant way of speaking and behaving. The truth was, he was tired of his own way of living; he was about fed up with his own mob. People like this Mr. Howe were on a higher plane, and Joe Leander was a little embarrassed, disturbingly impressed by the genteel *savoir faire* of the older man.

Just in these few minutes, Joe had begun to realize that it would be wonderful to live like Mr. Howe and be refined like him. A young guy was a fool to stay a mug all his life. It might be possible to be a gentleman, without being a sap. There were no gentlemen in the Zelig mob, but here and there was a good boy.

Always gifted with imagination Joe began to visualize himself as living uptown here and putting behind him all his past. Right here in this hotel he could be tremendously happy if he could live and mix with people like Mr. Howe and his friends. There was nothing snobbish or fawning in this urge—merely, it was a personal and instinctive groping for the benefit of a higher civilization. Like most people, however, Joe Leander was not at all certain what constituted civilization.

He knew that money alone was not making him happy. This week had been a good one financially. He had—in behalf of Little Tony Zelig—shaken

down six stuss games on Second Avenue. Nine speakeasy owners on the lower East Side had contributed for super-police protection, and immunity by and from the Zelig gang. Four warehouse concerns had kicked in fifty dollars each on the theory that it was the safest and best policy. In addition to this, Ed Fontella who operated the stuss and poker room on Avenue A in which Joe Leander owned a half interest, reported nice takings for the week.

Not all of this money, of course, stayed in Joe Leander's pocket; he got only twenty per cent of what he collected in behalf of Little Tony Zelig, which was fair enough. It was nice, clean work, too. Little Tony recognized Joe as a superior type and never called upon him for any of the rough work that properly belonged to the gorillas.

The gang, generally, recognized that Joe Leander had class, but that did not mean they thought him yellow. Far from it. His parents died when he was just a kid, and he grew up a street waif. In his lifetime he had licked a hundred guys with his fists and was still willing anytime to take on the toughest of them. No question about that.

He had packed a gun ever since he was a child. One summer night when he was only sixteen years old he had stepped into a blazing line of fire and stopped in his shoulder a bullet that had been intended for Little Tony Zelig. It had seemed, at the time, the thing to do; and whatever Tony's faults, he was not ungrateful. If Joe Leander was a thug and a racketeer it might be possible to attribute his status to environment and boyish hero-worship, rather than to any special wickedness of the soul. Any man brought up among savages might reasonably be ex-

pected to absorb a savage code of honesty and conduct.

Joe, lately, was beginning to suspect that life was a little different from Tony Zelig's conception of it. Zelig, though, had a shrewd brain; this latest racket of shaking down property owners was beginning to open up, a splendid new field of income. Yet it was the same old gag in a new form, and Joe Leander wasn't especially thrilled. The trick was profitable, but it lacked romance.

RIGHT now, Joe didn't feel like putting the bee on his agreeable host.

Just for once, he wanted to get away from the racket. The self-contained Harrison Howe had something that the young man wanted and admired—namely, a different kind and way of life.

The caller hesitated to bring up the crass business at hand, and Harrison Howe seemed to have forgotten all about it. However, in loyalty to Little Tony Zelig, the matter had to be faced.

"Mr. Howe," Joe began reluctantly, "you rented a three-story brick house to a guy named Lescabura. He rents out the two top floors to families and runs a speakeasy on the ground floor."

"I don't know anything about the details," Howe remarked negligently.

Joe, dallying with his drink, went in to his sales talk. "There used to be a grocery store on the ground floor and you got two hundred dollars a month rent for the whole building. Now Lescabura pays you four hundred dollars a month. That's because you leased the place for a speakeasy. You're getting two hundred dollars a month velvet out of Lescabura, Mr. Howe."

For once in recent years, Howe thought a little bit about his property. "I knew the rent had come up—but I

didn't know why." He was mildly interested. It was not a moral question to him and it did not affect his conscience. "Are you in the real estate business, Mr.—"

"Leander—Joe Leander. In a way I am in the real estate business. I represent the Tony Zelig Social and Athletic Association. It's a crowd of good boys and we do a lot of charity work. A lot of business men down town get us to look after things for them. For instance, if some tough guys come along and broke up Lescabura's business—suppose they tossed him and his bar out into the street. The police couldn't help him—and where would your rent money be? You'd lose your regular rent, besides your two hundred dollars a month velvet."

Harrison Howe saw the logic of this, but he had a suspicion that it was going to cost him money, therefore he was silent.

Joe Leander thought he might as well spring the bad news right now. "Your assessment will be fifty dollars the first of every month if you want our protection," he said flatly.

"And suppose I decline the opportunity?" Howe inquired.

"That would be just too bad," Joe told him frankly. "I mean it would be your hard luck."

"How so?"

"Well, if our boys got mad they might wreck your place down there themselves. I don't say they would—but they might."

"Is that a threat?"

"Certainly it ain't a threat, Mr. Howe. I'm just telling you. Ever hear about Little Tony Zelig?"

The name grew increasingly familiar to Howe. Yes, he recalled the newspaper notoriety of this gang leader.

"I see. It appears I'm up against a

case of extortion. Have you been in this business long, young man?"

JOE LEANDER was interested and impressed by Harrison Howe's urbanity and his manners. His host waved a cigarette with an easy gesture that suggested aristocratic disdain. There was no loss of temper, no anguishing protests such as were always emitted by victims of the lower order. No squawk, just an unruffled curiosity. Joe liked that in Harrison Howe.

"I've been knowing Tony Zelig all my life, Mr. Howe. I'm what you might call an agent, or a collector. When I tell you something you can depend on it. If I were you, I'd kick in with fifty smackers and save myself a lot of headache. You'll get your rent nice and smooth and there won't be any trouble. If you don't, your tenant might run into a lot of bad luck. I mean he mightn't be able to pay you anything at all."

Howe was not particularly interested in giving up fifty dollars a month, but he was wise enough to know there was a lot of truth in what he was hearing. Besides, he didn't have any foolish ideas about right and justice. There was a lot of graft in New York and much of it, apparently, was unavoidable. Single-handed, how could he oppose the Zelig gang? Furthermore, he didn't want any trouble; it was his object in life to avoid trouble.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," he said after a moment's thought, "you go see my agents and tell them I sent you. After they make an investigation and find if you're telling the truth, I suppose it'll have to be all right about the shake-down. But don't let's have any nonsense about the charity and benevolence of your gang. It's just plain gyp, isn't it?"

"It certainly is," admitted Joe Leander, honestly. "It's worth it to you, though."

Mr. Howe found the young man entertaining. He was refreshing! It took a man of innate generosity to not resent this form of robbery.

"Mr. Leander," he asked with open interest, "you're the first gangster I ever met—socially, so to speak. I've been wondering—have you ever been mixed up in these gang shootings I read about? Now that we've settled our business, I'd really be interested in a sort of informal sidelight on some of our famous killings."

"I don't know anything about that stuff. You wouldn't be interested, anyway."

Joe Leander was somewhat pleased to find that he, personally, was able to interest this well-bred gentleman. But of course he was not going to spill anything to an outsider; his eyes and face became perfectly blank.

"Oh, but I am interested, Mr. Leander. I'm interested in all kinds of people and all kinds of things."

"Mr. Howe," Joe announced, earnestly, "I'm not as bad an egg as you think I am."

"Lord, I'm not passing judgment on you. You're probably not half as bad as most respectable people."

Joe had few illusions about himself; he realized that Howe must regard him but little better than a common thief. Still, the guy had treated him with unruffled politeness. An uncomfortable feeling of shame began to burn in the young man.

Harrison Howe was not as easy-going as he seemed. He was thinking that, perhaps, this young gangster had done him a good turn. Fifty dollars a month was not excessive if it would provide protection that made possible a

hundred per cent increase rental from one building. If the police allowed such conditions to exist, there was nothing in Harrison Howe's philosophy to balk at the arrangements.

"Any time I can do you a favor," Joe said, "let me know. I don't mean this in a business way—I mean it personal."

"Thanks very much. I'll remember that."

Joe felt that he should be leaving, but it was nice to linger and absorb something of this satisfying atmosphere. Here was class of a new and stimulating variety. His own life down town was bleak and sordid and tough. Never before had he known—well, anybody like Mr. Howe.

CHAPTER II.

COMPLICATIONS.

FOR the moment, Harrison Howe had nothing better to do than spend a little time being interested in this strange young man. There was a quality about the boy, a receptive eagerness, that atoned for his sinister background.

"I suppose it's a life work, being a gangster?" Howe inquired in a friendly tone. "Is it interesting?"

"No, I'm getting sick of it," Joe blurted out. "I'm not interested in it at all any more."

"No? Why not?"

Joe sensed sympathy and understanding. "I don't know why it is, Mr. Howe. A change's been coming over me lately." Strange how easy it was to open up to this nice old bird. Usually, with a stranger, Joe Leander was tight as a clam. "I'm not interested in these rackets any more. It's getting to be like a business—a routine."

"What does interest you?"

"People, I guess. A different kind of mob than I've been going wit'."

Harrison Howe's eyes opened in surprise. "Why, you're like I am! I'm gregarious, I must have people around me all the time. Interesting people."

The word gregarious bothered Joe, but he gathered its import.

"If there's anything I hate," he stated, "it's a dumb-bell."

Howe beamed. A mutual interest mutually discovered seemed to be knitting them closer together. Joe Leander, he thought favorably, was an extraordinarily intelligent young man.

"I know exactly how you feel," he told his caller expansively, for his drink was stimulating him slightly. "I've been sick of business men and Babbits for years. The best years of my life were spent with them, but I got out of it. And my advice to you—"

The ringing of his telephone cut him short. After a moment's conversation he hung up and turned to Joe.

"You sit right where you are. There's a friend of mine downstairs, and she's coming right up. I want you to meet her. A fine, bright girl—I'm going out to the elevator to meet her."

A tremor of dread mingled with Joe's thrill of anticipation. Probably she would be some swell-looking girl and she'd high-hat him to death, make him feel like a lousy bum. Finding him here in Mr. Howe's place, she'd naturally expect him to be a gentleman. Of course, he'd show himself up the first time he opened his mouth. Hell! All these swell dames were too wise to be fooled. She'd spot him for an ignorant hoodlum in a minute.

It was funny how the molls that hung around the gang didn't attract him any more. They were too easy to

get. He saw through them and there was no fascination in their flash clothes, their paint and their perfume. It disgusted him that they were as low as the men. A real girl, some instinct told him, wouldn't be that way. A girl ought to keep something back, hold something in reserve. Maybe there were such girls in the world—out in the country, or some place. Joe knew that this was a funny way for a guy to feel. He couldn't understand it himself. A girl ought to make a fellow glow and feel glad, but he had never met that baby yet.

Then Eleanor Giddings came into the room, followed by Harrison Howe. Her effect upon Joe Leander was instantaneous and startling. She was not flashingly beautiful. She wasn't big and she wasn't little; her eyes were blue, her hair was sort of yellow and she was very slender. Somehow, Joe got the idea that an electric light was burning inside her and it made her luminous. He drew air sharply into his lungs; it was practically a gasp. His heart throbbed; she was walking in the midst of a golden glow. He found himself standing on his feet.

"**E**LEANOR, this is a young friend of mine, Mr. Leander—Miss Giddings."

"Oh, hello," she said, and her voice was golden, too, like the plucked strings of a harp.

"Hello, yourself." Joe's response sounded rude, but that was due to a kind of paralyzed embarrassment.

Eleanor Giddings looked at him with an odd interest. She knew immediately, of course, that he wasn't at all her kind. Uncle Harrison—he was a distant relative of one of her cousins—always had funny and interesting people around him.

She lived with her parents in Boston. They were extremely respectable people. Eleanor, however, was thoroughly modern and knew what was going on. When she came down on an occasional visit to New York for the opera and things like that, her visits to Uncle Harrison in the Tenderloin were described as slumming, to the horror of her parents. Harrison Howe, to his own kin, was a black sheep. Eleanor found him vastly refreshing and his friends positively fascinating. It was like seeing how the other half lived. Her fiancé, Lee Martin, a young lawyer, sometimes accompanied her to Howe's; Martin lived in the city and knew his way about town. Even Eleanor didn't suspect the breadth—and depth—of her future husband's metropolitan knowledge.

"You must have a drink, Eleanor," Harrison Howe told her.

"I suppose I must," she said, reluctantly.

Joe watched her sip the concoction. She shuddered and put it aside. Gee! He felt a sentimental flood of emotion. She was too fine, too lovely, for hooch. She was like an angel or something—only she had more class than any angel he ever saw in a picture. And more pep.

Looking at her had the same effect upon him as being socked in the chin; it made him groggy.

She smiled at him and he thought her eyes were like blue stars.

"Uncle Harrison always has such remarkable people about," she said to him. / "I'm sure there's something quite thrilling about you, too, Mr. Leander."

He was nervous in her presence, but he tried to hide it. Even if she was heavenly, there was no use in letting her know she had his goat.

"There's nothing thrilling about me, Miss Giddings," he said, stiffly.

"Oh, you're far too modest!" she declared audaciously. "You look interesting and there is certainly a lot of vigor in that necktie you're wearing. Pardon me if I am too personal, but I always try to throw off my Boston inhibitions down here at Uncle Harrison's."

Joe didn't know whether to hate his necktie or adore it; but she certainly was a peach! A little of his ecstasy began to fade and he saw that she was, after all, human. She had a nice calf and there was something luscious about her lips.

Harrison Howe leaned back in his chair and regarded her with a sort of paternal approval. "Going to be in town long, Eleanor?"

"For a week maybe," she told him. "And I don't want to be interfered with—I want to have some fun. I'm going to be married in the spring, as you know, Uncle Harrison, and I don't suppose I'll have much chance after then."

"Lord, I never cramped anybody's style," Harrison Howe protested.

SO she was going to be married! Joe Leander felt a rush of sudden, primitive hatred for the lucky man. He couldn't help it. To envy a man was to hate him and to hate a man—

The simple code of the gang world was to eliminate a rival or a man you hated. Joe realized, of course, that such rough stuff didn't go with swell people. Still, he was a creature from a world that had its own unvarnished traditions; he was as much a product of tradition as, for instance, an English earl.

Environment and tradition—a dozen

successive underworld dynasties accounted for him and produced him. In his background were crime, poverty, political corruption; from the depths of the slums to the white lights of Broadway had been a march of more than a hundred years; the line of descent ran back through innumerable bloody, brawling gangs; the Gophers, the Hudson Dusters, the Gas Housers, the Eastmans, the Dead Rabbits, the Five Pointers—back to the misty legend of that incredible strutting peacock of gangland, Mose, the Bowery B'hoy.

The heart of a gangster, usually, is made of brass. Externally, Joe Leander was true to type, yet with all his daring, though, he didn't have the nerve to aspire toward Eleanor Giddings.

But he could and did resent the man she loved. Probably the lucky stiff was some high-hat fellow that read books like Gene Tunney. Joe had a simple, honest desire to paste the guy's detestable jaw.

"Most of the people around here have some intriguing profession, Mr. Leander," she said. "Are you an actor, or something like that?"

"I never was and I never want to be," he told her.

"Really? I'll bet you do interesting things of some sort."

Joe grinned faintly. "I am a collector—an installment collector."

"How delightful!" she said, politely.

Just for a moment Harrison Howe's face was worried. Eleanor, after all, was a relative and a nice girl besides; and Joe Leander was a rather dangerous character. Howe didn't mind her knowing Joe as an interesting specimen—but it wasn't right to deceive her about his character.

"When Mr. Leander says he is an installment collector, he's just joking," Howe told her. He looked straight at Joe, who flushed a little. "I think Eleanor could stand the truth, Mr. Leander."

It occurred to Joe with burning suddenness that he had been detected and thwarted in an attempt to pass himself off to this respectable girl. These people were regular and he had tried to misrepresent. The old guy hadn't exposed him; no, he had given Joe a chance to set himself straight.

It was humiliating to tell the truth to a girl like Miss Giddings. Never before had Joe been actually ashamed of his business.

"Yeah, I was kidding you," he said to her, but his eyes were downcast. "I'm a collector all right, but it's for the Zelig mob. It's a gang. A racket. We're what the newspapers call the underworld."

He stopped for the lack of words. At that, he'd said enough. She was a smart girl. Now, she'd know him for what he was—a common hoodlum—and he'd be about as welcome here as a guy with smallpox. All at once, he was hating the Zelig mob and himself with a blind and sickening fury; he knew that he was the scum of the earth. Without waiting, he was going to grab his hat and get out of here!

"Oh, you're a gangster!" Eleanor Giddings cried. "That's the most interesting thing I ever heard!"

Joe was on his feet, reaching for his hat. He felt as low as a worm. "I'll be going, Mr. Howe."

"Oh, don't go—please don't!" Eleanor begged him. "Do sit down again. It's too perfect! I wouldn't miss the opportunity for anything in the world. Everybody reads in the papers about gangsters and the under-

world, but nobody actually knows anything about it. Something tells me, Mr. Leander, that you're going to be a regular education for me."

JOE stopped stark still. This was approval! Instead of scorning him, Eleanor Giddings acted like he was a hit. He was speechless. He stood there turning his hat in his hands, his face hot and stinging.

"I thought you might enjoy meeting a gangster," Harrison Howe said to Eleanor. "It's an interesting experience."

"I devour interesting experiences!" the girl declared. "I'm a natural-born slummer and I have the soul of a tourist. Heaven sent you to me, Mr. Leander. I'm going to make you take me to a dive. All of my life, I've been wanting to see a dive and I never have. Even Uncle Harrison never took me."

"A girl like you don't want to see no dive," Joe mumbled.

"Oh, don't I? You men, all of you, are about twenty-five years behind the times. Whether you like it or not, we women are going to places and do things. You will take me to a dive, won't you, Mr. Leander?"

"He will not!" declared Harrison Howe. "Lord knows, I haven't much sense of responsibility, but I have some. You don't understand how tough this town really is, Eleanor."

"But I want to find out!"

Even Joe Leander was shocked. She was so damn innocent!

"Don't you let her go out of your sight in this town," Joe told his host in alarm. "She ought to be home with her mother and father!"

Eleanor's brow wrinkled and her eyes contracted. All of her life she had done exactly as she pleased.

"Of course, Mr. Leander, if you

think I'm a terrible person and I bore you to death, you needn't bother with me," she said crisply. "Maybe I'm not the livest wire on earth, but young men don't usually fall asleep when they're with me. I'm not suffering from any respectability complex and I don't mean maybe.

"Why can't you be a sport and take me out?"

This talk to Joe Leander sounded like blasphemy. His innate intelligence told him that she was merely curious—that she was not fast. You could always tell the real wild ones; there was something about them. Miss Giddings was a lovely creature, trying to act like the wise ones. The brutal danger was that sometime she might stumble into an awful mess.

"Are you going to turn me down flat?" she demanded.

"You ain't got no business going out with a guy like me," he told her frankly.

"You don't like me at all?"

"Sure, I like you," he said embarrassed. "The trouble is, you don't understand about me. You don't want to get mixed up with no gangster—they're rotten. Mr. Howe wouldn't let you, anyway."

"That's right," Howe said. "The people that hang around here in this hotel—well, it's all in fun with them, but there's a rougher element that is criminal and deadly."

"I am a spoiled child and I'm used to having my own way," Eleanor stated. "I'm not pining to get into trouble, Uncle Harrison. And I'm not as crazy as you think. With me it would just be an interesting experience and I'm quite confident that Mr. Leander is a perfect gentleman. Much more so, probably, than a lot of these nice boys that make gentility a profes-

sion. You'd treat me swell, wouldn't you, Mr. Leander?"

Joe didn't know whether he was being kidded or not, but his heart was pounding and the delectable personality of Eleanor Giddings was completely intoxicating him. He was having hot and cold flashes.

"If you ever went out with me," he said earnestly, "I'd knock anybody's block off that looked at you twice."

"There!" she cried triumphantly to Harrison Howe. "I told you it would be all right, Uncle Harrison. I'm going out with Mr. Leander, to-night. And not to a movie, either. I'm going to make him take me to a real dive!"

Poor Joe stood there torn with delight and embarrassment and an eerie sensation that miracles were happening to him.

He looked at Harrison Howe, who had become as stern looking as his pleasure-loving nature permitted. He was essentially a weak man and his objections lacked force.

"You'll do nothing of the kind, Eleanor!" he commanded her, realizing himself the futility of his words.

"You have nothing to say about it," she retorted, with satisfaction. "I'm staying at the Ritz-Plaza, Mr. Leander. I'd just love you to call for me at eight o'clock to-night, and I will be expecting you. Just ring up my room and I'll be right down. Won't you do that for me—just one night out of your life?"

"I'll do anything you say." He hung his head a little.

"Fine! Uncle Harrison here will try to talk you out of it, but you go right away now. I'll stay with him and you needn't listen to a single word he says. Just be at the Ritz-Plaza to-night at eight."

Joe Leander nodded a brief "Okay!" When he walked to the door and left, he was walking on air.

CHAPTER III.

AMONG ENEMIES.

IT was difficult for Joe Leander to decide the best place to take Eleanor Giddings. He went home to the little flat he occupied jointly with his partner, Ed Fontella. There, troubled with indecision, he changed to a dark blue suit of clothes; also he put on his less violent necktie. Privately he thought the girl was crazy to harbor the notion of visiting one of the tough joints.

She was a great little package of class, all right, but something of his delight was beginning to fade. It was a great responsibility to pilot her among a lot of bums who didn't care what they said or did. Besides, she gave him an unpleasant sense of inferiority; he felt like a tame gorilla she was expecting to do tricks. At the same time, he was conscious of an acute, pleasurable sensation in his heart all of the time; he couldn't stop thinking about her.

Ed Fontella came and listened cynically to Joe's plight. It was all over Ed's head, this exultation of his partner. Ed was squat, heavy browed, and his mental processes were simple.

"You must be getting simple in the head to fall for a jane like that," he derided Joe. "She'll just make a monkey out of you, that's all. Guys like you are just a big laugh to these swell people. Gee, I never thought you'd go for that stuff, Joe."

"Don't worry about me none being a sap," Joe returned. "What I'm wondering is where do I take her?"

"How about a sight-seeing bus to Chinatown?"

"Aw, she's too smart to be fooled that way. I tell you she's a wise kid, even if she is wonderful. She knows what everything is all about."

"You might take her to Horse McGuire's," Ed suggested, helpfully.

Joe had been thinking the same thing. Horse McGuire owned about the best joint downtown. The trouble was that neither Joe nor Ed Fontella nor Little Tony Zelig liked McGuire; he was a bad egg. Even in gangland he was too hard for any pleasant association. McGuire's place was a restaurant with a bar behind swinging doors in the rear; upstairs he ran a gambling house. Nobody, not even Little Tony Zelig, exacted tribute from Horse McGuire, who had his own small crowd of vicious henchmen. Some day, inevitably, he would have to reckon with Zelig; but that day was not yet.

When Ed Fontella drifted out of the flat, Joe got McGuire, personally, on the phone.

"Lissen, Horse," he said, almost eagerly, "I was wondering if you could do me a favor."

"Why, certainly, kid," McGuire returned, faintly sarcastic. "I love doing you guys favors."

"It's this way," Joe went on. "I got a swell girl from uptown—the real article—and I got to entertain her this evening. She wants to come down here and get an eyeful of the life, see? I don't want to steer her into any rough stuff, understand? If we were to blow into your joint to-night I wonder if you could give us special attention?"

"What do you mean, special attention?" McGuire inquired.

"Well, see that none of these goril-

las or drunks come around the table where you plant us. I don't give a damn about myself, of course, but I don't want her to hear a lot of rough language, or anything like that."

"You're particular as hell, ain't you?" McGuire retorted.

"I'm telling you this is a nice girl I got wit' me, Horse. On the level, there are people like that in the world, even if you don't know it."

"I get you," McGuire responded. "Sure, Joe, I'll look out for you. You needn't be afraid—I ain't running a honkytonk."

"Don't worry about me being afraid," Joe shot back. "The boys can get as rough as they like any time I ain't got a lady."

SHORTLY after nine o'clock, Joe Leander came into Horse McGuire's establishment with Eleanor Giddings on his arm.

There was no splendor here, nor anything markedly solid either. At the entrance was a rack for hats and coats and, inevitably, a check girl. The noise from a mechanical piano was in the place, and several couples were dancing in a cleared space behind the scattering tables. Eleanor's bright eyes immediately showed disappointment.

"Oh, this is nothing like I thought it would be," she said as Joe took her to a table against the wall, fairly distant from the other customers.

"Nothing is ever like you expect it to be," he said with a strange flash of wisdom.

"But it's so tame," she said, sitting down. "And respectable, too. Those couples dancing—they look so extremely proper."

Joe's eye roved the place. He knew three of the young men dancing; two of them had committed murder and

the third was just out of Sing Sing. One of the girls on the floor was the wife of a rum-runner. The other two were sweethearts of gangsters. On the other side of the room sitting together at a table were Kid Blood and Billy the Goat. At least a dozen gentlemen present bore automatics upon their persons; in fact, Joe himself carried a gat in his side coat pocket.

"Well, this is the toughest joint I could bring you to," he told Eleanor, resignedly. "Of course, you probably won't see murder done right before your eyes, but there are several guys here that ain't above it, in a pinch."

She swept the room with her friendly blue eyes; several of the girls were rather pretty and the young men looked like sleek street loafers. The whole adventure lacked thrill. If this was the world of crime, it was dull, cheap and stupid. For the first time, really, her interest swerved from the imagined novelty of her excursion, and centered upon her escort.

Actually, in the back part of her mind, she had been interested in Joe Leander all the time. He was crude, yet there was something nice about him, too; she liked his dark eyes, his clear skin and his odd, embarrassed shyness. All of her feminine instinct told her that she had overwhelmed him just as easily as she had made conquests of dozens of young men in her own circle. This knowledge was, perhaps, the real thrill of the evening. Not every girl in her set could boast of capturing a real honest-to-goodness gangster!

What she did not admit to herself, was that Joe Leander might be able to reach her through the senses, that there was an insistent something in her, a forbidden urge, that she didn't want to think about. She had felt it

the first instant they had met, like a tiny shock of electricity. However, she had no intention of demolishing the barriers of social caste—besides, she was engaged to Lee Martin, and a nice boy he was, too.

"I'll tell you a secret," she said. "You're going to have to feed me, because I haven't had dinner yet."

"Gee, neither did I!" Joe grinned.

She was surprised at the excellence of the food obtainable. Particularly, she enjoyed the dill pickles and the rye bread. She thought it would be a lark to order corned beef and cabbage and was delighted to find that she liked it. Joe ordered for her a foaming stein of beer, but she found it unpleasant to her palate. In the midst of their meal, a tall, broad man with a long bony face strolled over to their table; his gray eyes were like ice beneath thick black brows.

"Hello, Joe," he said in a half-mocking voice.

"Hello, Horse," Joe returned, not graciously. He did not rise. The other pulled out a chair and, without invitation, sat down at their table. In addition to his impoliteness, Eleanor disliked his looks, the way his frigid eyes rested upon her boldly.

"THIS is Horse McGuire, Miss Giddings," Joe said, prompted to the introduction by necessity. "He owns this place."

McGuire put out a heavy hand, and Eleanor Giddings gave him her own in a clasp that ended when she drew her fingers out of his lingering grasp.

"Joe telephoned me he was bringing over a swell dame to-night—and he was right, at that," McGuire told her unsmilingly. "I promised him I'd see that nothing bad happened to either of you."

Joe flushed. "I phoned him on account of you," he explained to Eleanor. "I don't need any protection from Horse myself."

"That's right, nobody needs any protection in my place," Horse said. "I run a nice, quiet, respectable business here. Some of the best people in town come down and patronize me—professional people. I run a little card game and roulette wheel upstairs."

Joe began to get sore. Was McGuire trying to get his goat by butting in? If the fellow had any brains at all, he would know he wasn't wanted. It burned Joe up to see Eleanor Giddings talking to McGuire.

"I'm sure you have a very interesting place," she said politely.

Just then an electric piano started another raucous tune, and McGuire rose; his hand went under Eleanor's elbow.

"How about a little dance?" he asked calmly.

She knew instantly that Joe would object bitterly, but for once in her life poise deserted her. There was a cold wickedness about Horse McGuire—and she wanted to avoid a scene. Since she had come to a place like this, there was no use trying to be discriminating. It was all in fun anyway. Swiftly she arose and was borne upon the dance floor by Horse McGuire.

Despite his size, he was a perfect dancer; he said not a word to her throughout the music, and when it was ended walked back to the table and seated her in her chair.

Joe Leander's face was livid. She had never seen him look like that before. The smile died on her lips. Joe's eyes were blazing pools of concentrated hate. He sat perfectly motionless; only the flanges of his nostrils moved when he breathed.

Eleanor had seen men angry with jealousy before—but this was more than anger; it was frozen fury, a thousand times multiplied because it was compressed. It chilled her to see him; something gripped perilously around her heart.

All at once she realized that she did not really know Joe Leander at all—he was a total stranger, a deadly creature, a bundle of nervous energy held in control but dangerously uncertain. She forced herself to look into his eyes, and she saw what she had never seen before; all the ferocity under the surface veneer, all the undisciplined background, all the blood and lust of a modern savage.

The processes of education and home and environment that had made Eleanor Giddings what she was had never touched the life of Joe Leander. They were from separate spheres of life, divided by the widest of chasms. Yet there was, too, an invisible bridge, a shadowy connection of feeling that vaguely spanned the gulf. She had the curious feminine emotion for him that mingled understanding and amazement—a strange attraction that persisted in keeping her interest alive.

"I'm sorry I danced with him," she said softly, yet firmly.

His face was set like a pallid mask; he spoke out of a labored effort at self-control. When he spoke his voice trembled:

"How the hell could you help it? I brought you here, didn't I? It's him!"

"It's nothing to take seriously."

"He thought he could get away with that! It was his way of slapping my face."

"Oh, you're taking it too seriously. He probably didn't mean anything at all by it."

"I can't let him get away with it. I'm going to take you out of here now."

"Where are you going to take me?" she asked with a slight smile.

"Back to your hotel."

"What are you going to do then—come back here?"

JOE realized that he had already said far too much. She was a nice girl; she was alien to all this. He had been a fool to bring her in the first place.

"But I don't want to go back to the hotel, and I think you're perfectly silly," she said, with a sudden streak of stubbornness. "We started out to spend an evening together, and just because something goes wrong it's childish to quit. It's a little bit yellow, isn't it?"

Joe couldn't help smiling a little at her. She was as ignorant as a child. What could she know about these things?

The affair with McGuire was immediately serious; beyond doubt Horse had meant to insult Joe deliberately. He had done it through Joe's girl—the most definite of all methods. McGuire knew well the significance of his act. It was more than a slap at Joe Leander—it was a gesture of contempt toward Little Tony Zelig and all of his followers. Yes, it was the beginning of trouble long deferred.

Again, Joe's eyes ranged around the place, noting those present. Most of the men on hand were Horse McGuire's followers; at least they were under obligations to him. All of them had witnessed Joe's humiliation. One fellow looked at him and grinned; from another table there was the sound of cackling laughter. It wouldn't be long now. It might take several weeks

for any real action to develop. Of course, Little Tony Zelig, once he understood the situation, might not be disposed to wait. McGuire had no monopoly on aggression.

"If you think I'm yellow, that's all right with me," Joe told Eleanor. "I am going to take you out of this place, though. For a lot of reasons. Didn't you tell me you were engaged to marry some guy?"

"Yes, I'm engaged to marry," Eleanor responded. "Why?"

The idea of somebody else marrying Eleanor Giddings gave Joe a wincing pain, but he sought to influence her thereby to leave.

"If I were engaged to a girl, I wouldn't want her to be seen in Horse McGuire's place," he said. "I guess your boy friend probably feels the same way as I do. C'mon, let's get out of here."

She was pleased to see that his mind momentarily seemed no longer concerned with the affront from Horse McGuire. There was a pride, a little vanity, in the fact that she could bring him back to the personal when he was so wrought up about McGuire.

"If the boy friend I'm going to marry comes to places like this," she said unexpectedly, "I don't see why he should object if I do."

Just naturally Joe couldn't help disliking this unknown fellow, this equal of Eleanor Giddings's who was going to marry her.

"Your kind of fellow wouldn't ever know a place like McGuire's existed," Joe told her. "You can't fool me—you wouldn't get him into a trap like this."

Again Eleanor smiled at him, enjoying his reactions. "Evidently you think all lawyers are plaster saints."

"Is the law his racket?"

"Yes, and he knows a lot about your precious underworld, too. A good many of his clients come from down here. Oh, yes, he knows a lot about places like this and people like Mr. McGuire. I've asked him a dozen times to bring me down, but he never would."

"He's a wise guy," Joe commented.

"Anyway, Mr. Leander, you can't break my heart with your picture of the boy friend I'm supposed to be wronging. I'm having a very pleasant time, thank you, and enjoying everything. Most everybody in here is dancing now. Shall we join them?"

"Will you leave then?"

Eleanor nodded. "We'll dance once and then leave—only we won't go home. We'll go some place else."

On the dance floor, with his arm around her and the magic of her nearness overpowering his anger at McGuire, Joe gave himself up to several minutes of blissful enjoyment. There was no other girl in the room—no other girl on earth—to match her. But she belonged to somebody else! His common sense told him he was torturing his own heart by playing around with her. She could never mean anything in his life—by to-morrow she would have forgotten him.

BEFORE the dance was finished there fell suddenly upon his arm the clutch of a man's hand. Instantly Joe knew that he had stayed too long—the pressure of the fingers, even before he saw the evil face of Bennie Kirsh, was fraught with menace. It was indeed a disagreeable countenance that smirked at Joe Leander; Bennie's features were long and sallow; the forehead sloped back and the narrow eyes were shifty and, odd-

ly, timid. A hanger-on, a minor satellite of McGuire's, Bennie possessed but the brain and the nerve of a sneak.

"How about me cutting in for a share of this dance, Joe?" he inquired with artificial courage. "C'mon, be sociable."

Joe released Eleanor and brushed Kirsh's hand away contemptuously. He knew immediately that Bennie Kirsh, alone, didn't have the nerve to pull anything this raw. Only among close pals was cutting-in permitted. Joe's gaze crossed the room and caught a group at a table watching him. Kid Blood, Billy the Goat, Horse McGuire himself, bunched together.

"Get away from me, Rat!"

The narrow eyes of Bennie Kirsh batted rapidly; he was afraid, yet he had been sent out with plenty of backing to make a rummy out of Joe Leander.

"Aw, c'mon—be sociable."

Joe lifted his left hand and placed the palm over Bennie Kirsh's face; he gave a shove that sent the intruder slipping and spinning across the floor. It was Joe's reply to the mob—he did not even waste a punch on their cat's-paw. Just pushed him in the face! Bennie's momentum carried him right back to the table from which he had started.

"Beat it for the front door!" Joe whipped out to Eleanor. "Fast!"

At last, rather late, the girl realized that this was no place to spend a pleasant evening. There was movement around the other table; Kid Blood and Billy the Goat had risen to their feet. She caught Joe's sleeve. "Come with me!"

"Damn it, do what I say!" he shot at her so viciously that the very words seemed to hit her with physical force. "I'll get jammed up if you stick!"

He meant it so ferociously that she could not help understanding that she was hampering him. Suddenly she was of no importance whatever in the situation; she retreated toward the doorway.

Kid Blood—thug, bruiser, mauled the way to Joe; stealthily behind him came others closing in, Horse McGuire among them. Joe knew exactly what all this was about; they didn't mean to kill him. No, they'd just beat him up good; toss him into the street. He couldn't get his mind off Eleanor; she still complicated the situation. Left to himself, he would have stayed and shot it out with the mob. But he could have no singleness of purpose as long as she remained in the offing watching and waiting.

"Where do you get the business to start trouble in my place?" McGuire demanded. "You hit Bennie and—"

"If you're so fond of socking somebody," snarled Kid Blood, "why don't you take a poke at me?"

IT is doubtful if Eleanor, had she seen him, would have recognized the changed Joe Leander who faced these enemies. He was a different man—a cruel-faced, desperate personality. A glitter shone in his eyes; he gave a short laugh, a jeering bark out of one side of his mouth.

"Why don't you call out the army to take me, McGuire?" he sneered.

"Just for that wisecrack I'm going to lay you like a carpet," Horse McGuire retorted, pushing forward.

Again Joe's brief jeering bark of a laugh sounded. This was what he wanted—to bring McGuire closer to him.

Joe's right hand wandered upward toward his coat and pressed against his side as though covering some spot

or pain. In reality, the hand was creeping nearer to the holstered gun under his coat.

The men around McGuire gave way for their leader; McGuire, utterly confident, advanced a step. His narrow eyes were cold and hard; his jaw was set. The lines graven around his mouth ran downward sneeringly. It was not a face that invited argument; it suggested immediate brutalized action.

"If you think you can get away with this, you're crazy!" Joe rasped out. "When Tony Zelig hears what you tried, he'll wipe out this rats' nest and you along with it, McGuire."

The leer on McGuire's face deepened. "You'll be in the hospital the next time Tony Zelig sees you."

If McGuire meant to say more, his speech was suddenly paralyzed. His mouth stood agape. So swiftly had Joe Leander's hand darted under his coat and reappeared holding an automatic that the actual movement had been almost too fast for eye to follow. The blunt barrel, a blue-black weapon, was jammed hard against McGuire's stomach.

"Now, you big bum," cried Joe, spilling the words out of his mouth sidewise, "am I going to blow you to pieces, or ain't I?"

Menace, in the batting of an eye, had shifted sides. Joe, with his trigger finger, absolutely held the power of life or death over Horse McGuire. No movement on the part of McGuire, no matter however sudden, would be quick enough to thwart the bullets if Joe chose to send them roaring forward.

McGuire and his men around him suddenly stood petrified. They knew that in another instant their very lives might be shattered by the thunder of Joe's gun. Slowly their faces lost col-

or, but McGuire's went fastest to a mottled, pasty pallor. Gradually his lips showed a blue tinge.

"You wouldn't shoot me, Joe," he said quickly.

"I'd rather shoot you than anybody on earth!" Joe said, his voice steel. "If you make one false move, I'm going to let you have it so fast you won't know what happened. Tell them rats of yours to get back against the kitchen wall."

McGuire's voice was dry as his lips. "Why, sure, Joe." Without looking directly at his henchmen he spoke to them. "Get away from here, you fellows!"

They started to move, when Joe's voice barked at them: "Just stick your hands up as you go—and keep 'em up!"

They obeyed to a man, and the interested spectators in the place witnessed the unusual spectacle of several pale gangsters moving in a huddle with their arms upstretched in the air. A partition blocked their further progress.

"You guys just stand with your faces against the wall and your backs toward me," Joe commanded.

Men unfamiliar with sudden death in the underworld might have proved obstreperous, but these hard birds had too many times seen murder not to know its danger. At that, they were getting off lucky. A lot depended upon how meek they made themselves right now; certainly it was no time for mock heroics.

"Stick up your hands, McGuire, and get over there in line with your other stiff!" Joe's voice crackled.

By this time McGuire had begun to realize that his danger was passing if he behaved himself. A little color came back to his face.

"Why, certainly, Joe," he said, trying to be casual. "Anything to oblige."

He turned and joined the other ridiculous figures against the wall. It was a burning humiliation to be thus degraded in his own joint before patrons. Still, his desire to live was stronger than his pride, and he swallowed the insult.

CHAPTER IV.

AN ATTEMPT AT RESCUE.

JOE traversed the distance to the front door with a sidling step that enabled him to keep careful watch on his enemy. However, his caution was scarcely necessary. They had enough of him for the time being.

The dangerous tenseness had by now faded from his face; he was pale, breathing hard, but his emotions were under control when he met Eleanor, waiting at the door. Her eyes were wide; she quivered with sharp excitement, for she had seen him juggling with his life. Her heart pounded and her mouth was dry. She had stood there rooted in horror, yet she had not flinched, nor screamed, nor fled.

"Thank God!" she breathed. All that was frivolous had evaporated from her. She was excited, awe-stricken; yet she was not afraid. "It was all my fault; please forgive me."

He seized her arm, not bothering to reply. Together they pressed through the door. At the curb was the taxicab waiting for a chance fare. Straight into it Joe propelled her, jerking open the door. Actually they plunged into the machine. He rasped out a swift command to the driver.

"Get away from here fast!"

The driver tarried not to ask ques-

tions. Quick to sense an emergency, he spun his engine, shifted his gears, and darted off with a jerk that sent Joe and Eleanor banging against the back cushions. Through the rear window Joe glanced back. At the next block it turned again and shot away.

"Where are we going?"

Joe gave her a frozen grin. "I'm taking you home, sister."

"Hadn't you better tell the driver?"

Leaning forward, Joe told the man where to take them. "You can slow down a bit, buddy. Thanks for the getaway."

"Sure!" responded the driver cryptically.

Cushioned back on the seat, Joe for the first time felt a wave of fatigue pass through him. No man alive could experience such an outpouring of mental energy without suffering a nervous reaction.

Just for the moment his eyelids fluttered; it was sweet to know now that he was safe. Soon—perhaps it would be only a matter of hours—something would have to be done about Horse McGuire. It all depended upon what Tony Zelig decided, and Tony was a man of action.

But now, until the cab reached the Ritz-Plaza, Joe tried to relax. The girl at his side put an ache in his heart, but that would have to be overcome. It was a cinch that after to-night she'd never want to see him again. No high-class girl would stand for a guy that almost steered her into a bump-off.

"Joe," she said softly, "I don't want to go home."

"Don't be that way," he responded, full of consideration. "I'm ashamed to look myself in the face after I dragged you into a bucket of blood like that dump. You haven't got

any business going out with a bird like me."

"Oh, you're not so bad," she contradicted him. "In fact, I think you're rather nice—only, you ought to get away from the life you're living."

"I know it," he responded.

"Then, why don't you?"

HE tried to explain. "A lot of guys would be satisfied with my life. I make good money. We get used to taking risks. You see, I'm hooked up with Tony Zelig and his mob, and it's hard to break away. No guy likes to be a quitter."

"I suppose your loyalty is at stake?" quoted Eleanor.

"That's it."

"Why, I almost feel sorry for you," she exclaimed, her hand touching his sleeve. "I don't suppose you ever knew anything of a different kind of life. Those people to-night, they just aren't civilized. Are your friends like that?"

"Any mob in New York is tough," Joe admitted.

"But you aren't tough," she insisted. "I mean you aren't bad."

Joe was quick to set her right. "Don't make any mistake about me. I'm tied up with the racket, same as the rest of them."

She was silent for a while. Then, "I think I like you because you don't pretend. You warned me not to come with you, and you got me out of the place practically at the risk of your life. I was watching you when those terrible men were around you. You weren't afraid—you were perfectly brave and competent. I think you're a nice boy, Joe." She smiled.

"I think you're wonderful," he told her earnestly. "But you'd better not see me any more."

"You keep repeating that as though you were afraid I'd keep running after you," Eleanor said, a bit of huskiness in her tone. "Why, I'm not going to pursue any man, not even you. Tell me something, though. What are you going to do when you leave me?"

"I'm going back and see Tony Zelig."

"About this gang business?"

"That's it."

Suddenly, unexpectedly, she put her hand in his. "Promise me you won't."

It distressed him acutely, this touch of intimacy. They were both playing with fire. Dangerous, beautiful fire, but it wasn't fair to the girl. Some streak of chivalry in Joe Leander kept insisting that she was so fine that he had somehow degraded her. Not only that; he couldn't quite trust himself. Her very nearness appealed to all of his senses. He was crazy about her and afraid of her, and bewilderingly reverent before her, all simultaneously.

"I want you to give up all of your associates down there," she said. "I never thought I'd start reforming anybody, but you simply must break away. You have nerve and intelligence. You could make a place for yourself in real life instead of sinking deeper into the mud. If I ask you to give it up, will you do it?"

Never before had he been so moved. Just to be here with her opened up a whole new world of emotions. She seemed a million miles above him, yet she was so temptingly close.

"I don't mean that much to you," he muttered.

Again she was silent for a period. "I can't understand it myself," she said. "I may feel differently to-morrow, but to-night it all seems the most important thing on earth to me."

A strange thing happened. Of her own desire she moved closer to him—so close that her lips were only inches from his own. Without words, she raised her mouth, and before he realized the impossibility of it all his arms went around her. Their lips met for a long time.

It came to him as a startling revelation that she was as thoroughly human as himself. But this was madness, an intoxication of the senses. It was a gorgeously vivid dream. Joe Leander could not believe it. Even with her dear form in his arms, he was too dazed to comprehend the miracle that had befallen him.

"You won't go back!" she breathed, her hair brushing his cheek.

AN aching, twisting sorrow shot through his brief happiness.

Whether this was infatuation or love mattered not. No girl on earth could root out the deeply grained traits of his character. Down town, to-night, he had an obligation, a loyalty to his chieftain and his clan. Trouble was in the air. It was a matter of code.

Joe performed what was the greatest feat of will power he had ever accomplished. He put Eleanor away from him; withdrew all contact. Out of the welter of emotion had come the realization that he must decide between her and a stern duty. He was not the first man in the world's history faced with the choice between a woman and the call to action.

"I can't help it," he told her unhappily. "I gotta see Zelig to-night."

"Even if I ask you not to?" she questioned.

He resolutely refused to look at her. Her voice told him that she was shaken, distressed.

"I gotta do the right thing," he insisted doggedly.

"Very well," she stated, repressing all signs of excitement, "have it your way. You'll never see me again after to-night."

Her statement pierced Joe like a knife. Still, it represented the argument he was trying to force upon her: that she had no business being in his company. She had taken him at his word, and it hurt.

"Maybe that's best," he admitted.

They drove thereafter in silence to her hotel. Joe dismissed the cab and went to an elevator that was to take her upstairs.

"Do you mind coming upstairs with me a minute? It's quite all right—I have a suite."

"I don't know if I ought to."

But the elevator was at hand, ready to transport them to the upper elegance of the ornate hotel.

"Don't be afraid—I just want to see if I can help you," Eleanor told him. "I'm not going to get romantic, so don't be alarmed."

He followed her into the richly furnished room that was her private parlor. To Eleanor Giddings it was just an ordinary hotel room, but to Joe Leander it represented distinction and beauty.

"You tried to be nice this evening," she said to him. "Now I'm going to try to do you a good turn."

"You'd better let me go. It is getting rather late."

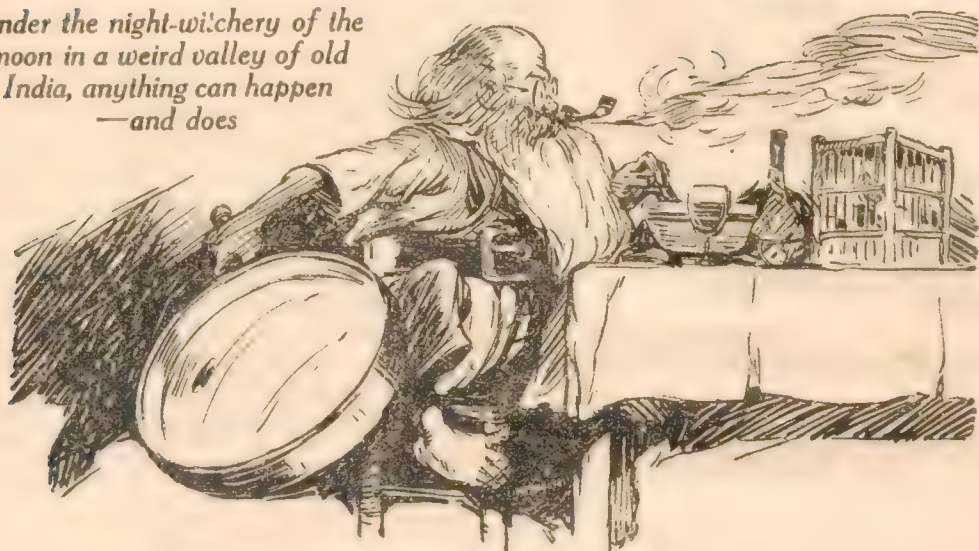
"Sit down."

She took off her coat and hat and carried them into an adjoining bedroom. Behind a closed door he thought he heard her telephoning. When she returned, her face had a grim, businesslike look.

Moon Up

An East-of-Suez Story

*Under the night-witchery of the
moon in a weird valley of old
India, anything can happen
—and does*



By THEODORE ROSCOE

Novelette—Complete

PROLOGUE

MOONLIGHT. To this day it brings the narcotic, heady scent of jungle flowers and green river to my nostrils; chases a cold chill down to the pit of my stomach; and conjures in my mind the vision of Dr. Habighorst as I saw him first—a quaint gnome trudging a kobold's trail; and as I saw him last—melted to a pair of eerie eyes a-glitter in the moonray.

Weird, unpleasant memories, these; especially the picture of those *bodyless* optics shining like miniature moons in the moonlight on the sand, while the echo of desperate screaming still lingered among the black crags across the green river. Those bodyless glass disks—all that was left of Gulick

Habighorst and his unknown assailant.

You may wonder, in reading, at the ready part I played in this bizarre story. You may believe me to have been ingenuous, or unwitting. Read through to the end, then, and recall your own shortcomings. Remember, too, the setting—Asia; India; the Orient. The very cradle of things strange. Have you ever caught the inscrutable stare of a Hindu *fakir's* eye, or known the subtly mysterious taste of a mango? There is a magic atmosphere east of De Lesseps's Canal impossible to Denver, Detroit or old Broadway. And those of you who have succumbed to legerdemain in the fairly rational atmosphere of Denver, Detroit or Broadway can imagine me in that thoroughly



*Was he the victim of imagination, or
did he see watching eyes?*

irrational, Orient-steeped valley of Houghlan Ra.

As for the moon: go out into your sane American back yard any clement night, and see how irrational and improbable and ethereal she seems, somehow a phenomenon not to be taken for granted. The sun is friendly, whole-hearted, masculine. The moon is aloof, feminine. Being a woman, she is given to subtleties. She is difficult to divine, illogical, possessed of a mysterious secretive way. Always she casts a spell. And when she dwells East of Suez, her powers are doubled. She's a little nearer earth out there. Aren't these lines from "Othello"?

It is the very error of the moon;
She comes more nearer Earth than she
was wont,
And makes men mad!

This is an East-of-Suez story. A

story about moonlight and men made mad.

CHAPTER I.

NIGHT VISITOR.

CERTAINLY that valley of Houghlan Ra lay under the spell of the East. You have heard the phrase, "spell of the East"? Yes; it came from that jungle-infested little ravine sliced out of the Himalaya foothills to allow a crooked river to come sneaking down from the peaks. The valley of Houghlan Ra. Oriental witchery simmered there between those clay-colored cliffs, and it was a place where no Christian man belonged.

There was a little and ancient Buddhist shrine squatting among the ban-yans of the valley's upper end, and when the hot breeze stirred its tem-

ple bell the valley was beyond relief. The bell emphasized the quiet, and the valley of Houglan Ra was too quiet to be healthy.

I sat on the bungalow veranda, sipping gin slings and listening to the silence. It occurred to me that the valley was always listening for something, too. There was no noise. Leaves rustled on the stalwart branches of the giant peepul tree commanding the center of the compound. The jungle that screened us in was whispering. Somewhere off a tiger coughed in its striped throat and startled a bevy of sleepy parrakeets into squeaking. But there wasn't any noise.

Mardo, my Punjabi native boy, squatted on his hams atop the veranda step and murmured out his evening devotionals. "Ram, ram, ram, ram, ram, ram—" But the prayer was scarcely audible; wasn't a sound. It fitted in, like the whisper of the peepul blossoms, the tinkle of the temple bell, the throaty cough of the tiger. It "belonged." But it made me nervous as I stared across the compound into an old-rose twilight that made a pattern of shadows among the cottonwoods and palms. I shouted at him to stop, and, naturally, he didn't. "Ram, ram, ram, ram, ram, ram—"

There was a monkey in the bungalow, and she began to cheep uneasily. The bungalow belonged to Holmes Bradshaw. You have heard of Holmes Bradshaw, the gaunt Kelantan naturalist. As a collector his name is known from Khartum to the Celebes Seas. It was he who donated the American Museum of Natural History its famous aardvark (*Orycteropus capensis*); donated the Berlin Hall of Science its sole specimen of the rare climbing fish (*Anabas scandens*); and donated Port-Light Pete Wong, the

famous China Coast renegade, a bullet in the belly.

Early that summer I had encountered him in Bombay, and the usual libationary rituals of old-time college mates meeting ten years later in an out-of-the-way corner of the world were indulged. After a round of Scotch and sodas, he had dug into his pocket and handed me a key. Did I want to do some real hunting, some tiger shooting in a corner of the Orient that was one hundred per cent Orient? The key opened his bungalow up there. His house boys would take care of me; I would find a rack of guns; and there were tigers and plenty of game.

In a few weeks or so he would follow me and we could shoot together. He wanted to trek a river up there and shoot a few giant gavials to send the Jardin des Plantes in Paris. There were gavials in that river measuring twenty-two feet in length; and if I didn't get myself a prize crocodile hide and a few choice tiger skins, he didn't know the place.

That had been some two months past, and Bradshaw had failed to show up. Frankly, I was a bit dismayed at staying there alone. I hadn't bagged my tiger, and I was going a bit deaf from quinine. Houglan Ra was a lonely cranny of the world with that temple bell tinkling softly into the jungly stillness and Mardo squatting like a wraith in the evening dusk, murmuring his prayer to Rama, the seventh incarnation of Vishnu, ruler of Hindustan. "Ram, ram, ram, ram, ram, ram—" A devout chap, Mardo.

"SAHIB," Mardo spoke suddenly, "some one is coming. Footsteps come up the trail from the south."

That was Mardo. I tell you, there

were times when the skinny Hindu made my flesh crawl. Here he had been squatting on the edge of the veranda, wrapped in a spiritual lethargy, eyes as vacant as the soul of a brass image. Then suddenly he could pivot on his heels, grin at me with a mouth made crimson by betelnut juice, and proffer the information that some one was coming up the trail.

Undoubtedly he had caught a sound foreign to the jungle quietude. No use in asking him how he heard such things, though. He would not admit he had heard. He would tell you he felt it, in his finger tips. He was a son of those jungle-clad foothills, and he often told me how the spirits of the night communicated with him.

"An enemy of mine in Peshawar has voted me a curse in his shrine tonight, *sahib*. It has dealt me the colic. Would the infinitely kind *sahib* loan me a drink of his whisky to ease the pain?"

Or: "Ah, *sahib*, the night wind brings me evil news. My aged mother in Calcutta died five minutes ago. Would the genial *sahib*—a gentleman and a prince, by the Oath of the Cow—loan me a few pice with which to condone the gods and salve her departed soul?"

Amazingly enough, in the latter case I found out later that his mother had died on the night in question. Perhaps there was something in the rascal's dirty finger tips after all.

Now he pointed a crooked thumb at the trail where it twisted atop the crest of a black sand cliff behind a wedge of palms, then ducked down through the trees and wandered up to the compound gate.

"Watch there, *sahib*. Soon you will see our visitor. No doubt it is the Bradshaw *sahib* whose coming you

have awaited. Or would the *sahib* desire me to bring him his rifle?"

Damn the beggar, why should I need my rifle? As a matter of fact, I did have my trusty Maynard close at hand, but I wasn't going to make any show of nerves before that betelnut-munching scarecrow. However, I stared at the ledge of rock where any traveler of the trail would first appear, and watched; hoping it would be Bradshaw come at last. Mardo edged a little closer, and kept pointed thumb. "Soon he will be seen, *sahib*. He travels fast and has come a long way. He travels alone."

It wasn't Bradshaw, then. The naturalist trekked along with a squad of ragamuffins to tote his specimens and outfit. Who could it be? Houglan Ra was a neck of the woods particularly avoided by wayfarers.

Mardo finally spat a red sluice of juice at a lizard on the step and declared the man coming up the trail was not a native. A hillman wouldn't make so much noise. He rattled off Hindee jargon in his prominent Adam's apple, offering the hope that the newcomer would not bring evil upon us. A comfortable sort of fellow to have around, Mardo was.

I watched the trail and Mardo watched the trail. Night came rolling down from the mountain behind us and drank up the twilight at a gulp. The jungle folk responded by a roundelay of tooting bird-calls, squeaking trees and whisperings down by the river. It was dark as a whale hole across the compound, but a scatter of hot tropic stars promptly flashed in the sky, and directly behind the cliff where the trail would be walked a brilliant orange-hued slice of moon pushed into the sky. A moment later and the figure of our traveler was picked in outline against

the shoulder of moon like a silhouette upon a screen.

"He is a stranger, *sahib*. We have never seen him before."

TRUE enough, we had never seen him before. At least, I hadn't.

From the veranda this nocturnal traveler gave the appearance of a Santa Claus flitting past the moon. The black silhouette against the yellow screen was that of a tiny figure almost bent double under a tremendous bulbous pack strapped on its back. A long, crooked staff supported and abetted a pair of spidery legs bowed as those of a parrot.

When the figure turned atop the cliff to start the descent of the path, it resembled nothing so much as some queer top-heavy jungle bird—a dodo marching out of its extinct past to pay Houglan Ra a visit. The dodo stopped against the moon for a brief instant, raised its staff, and hallooed:

"Hello, there, below! In the bungalow! Glad to see you are home!"

Mardo had a lantern going, and the shafts of light struggled through a glass chimney plastered with bugs, to add illumination to the compound which had been faintly lighted by the coming of the moon. The dodo atop the cliff had plunged out of sight, and it was not long before it came waddling out of the palms and up to the gate and across the compound. Now I saw it was not a dodo bird; it was a gnome. It puffed forward into the area of saffron lamplight, and from the shadows of the veranda I stared in rude astonishment. Gnomes, I had imagined, departed from one's world after one attained the age of ten. But this was Houglan Ra.

It was the huge pack that made him seem so small. Even so, he could not

have stood over four and a half feet with his legs straightened. Amazingly skinny and bowed legs they were, arched under a round belly and ending in enormous, bare feet. Their owner slung the sack from his shoulder when he reached the veranda step, and straightened up with a ponderous sigh; leaned on his crooked staff. His hands on the staff were clutching twigs, and nothing but a gnome could have owned such enormous and wholly monumental whiskers. Like a miniature, foaming Niagara, that white beard fell in a cataract from the lower part of his face to the broad and huge-buckled belt strapping his belly. Yes, he was a gnome, for his bald head was made of burnished copper. But his eyes weren't really twin yellow moons, I guess. They were huge, dollar-round glasses simply reflecting the glow from the lantern in Mardo's soiled hand.

Well, he certainly was a queer apparition to pop out of the Houglan Ra darkness at one. I had to cast back in my mind to recall what I had eaten for dinner before I could believe this stranger had really come. I stared at him and his glassy, shining moons stared at me; and Mardo's Adam's apple had begun to mumble again. I couldn't find anything suitable to say besides "damn" and "what the hell!"; so the Niagara-like whiskers spoke first.

"Well, my friend," they said in a gentle voice that could only have come from a philosopher, "I've come a long, long way to visit you. Houglan Ra is a devil of a place, isn't it? I had the very dickens of a time keeping on the trail. The very dickens of a time. And if it hadn't been for the *moon*—ah, my friend, the *moon*!"

When he said, "the moon," he chuckled merrily, and rubbed his palms

together so that they whispered. (So that was who he was! the Man in the Moon!) He went on:

"It's a wonderful phenomenon out here, isn't it? Brighter, more salient here than in any other locale of the world. I have been computing—but first, my friend, may I count on a little of your hospitality? I am very hungry and a finger of rum would not displease my dusted throat. I know you will pardon this rude intrusion on your solitude, and I am equally confident that my visit here will not prove amiss."

He chuckled quietly. "It may prove a good deal of a surprise, but— First, let me admit I know you; though you, possibly, have no acquaintance with me. As a former New York broker and money baron"—his voice was quite indulgent—"it is not improbable that you have never encountered my volumes, 'Atomology and the Proton,' 'Satellites and Molecular Activity,' 'Conceptions of the L-Ray,' and 'Lunar Electrolysis.' Works, I confess, a bit recondite for the lay mind. However, of these things we may talk later. At present I will foist myself on the more immediate gestures of your hospitality. I take the liberty of doing so because I know you will aid me, Mister Reven Staffard."

WELL, I could have been knocked over with a peacock feather.

A dodo mysteriously appears against the moon, changes into a gnome, and marches into camp to inform me it knows my former business and present name. He must have seen my face, for he clucked appreciatively in his beard.

I couldn't get a single word out of my neck as he calmly stepped to the veranda, waved to the gurgling Mardo

and asked to have his bundle deposited within the bungalow. When he turned on me again his whiskers were parted to show a smile. The moonlight got into his optics as he stood there, and his copper bald spot gleamed. Suddenly he pushed his face close to mine; fastened a twig on my sleeve.

"I," he declared in a hoarse whisper, "am Dr. Gulick Habighorst." His tone dropped an octave lower, and the words that hissed from his hoary whiskers stung the ear. "Reven Staffard, my coming here may place you in great danger. I carry in my pack a secret of inestimable value. Governments would totter and crash to own it. The pauper holding it would be thrice a king. The king without it could be reduced to ashes—to less than ashes. It is beyond price, wholly beyond human understanding. I, myself, fail at present to fully comprehend. But the peril—you will not mind. You will be richly rewarded. Reven Staffard," his voice was a husky echo like the sound of withered cornstalks rustled by an arid wind, "I am going to show you the most amazing, most astounding miracle of all God's world!"

CHAPTER II.

THE DOCTOR'S SECRET.

WHAT would you have thought? So did I. No doubt there were

asylums for the insane in India as elsewhere, and if inmates could escape from them elsewhere they could escape from them in India. I glared at Dr. Gulick Habighorst and my mouth hung wide open and two moths flew into it. Mardo never moved a muscle to reach for Dr. Gulick Habighorst's ponderous pack; and the good doctor

stood smiling with the moonshine glowing on his glasses.

Out across the compound a pair of monkies chattered in the peepul tree. The yellow moon rode clear from behind the black cliff and shed a spectral, algid ray into the cottonwoods. Somewhere up the crag a jackal started mournful ululation, and the perfume-freighted breeze from the river carried the gentle tinkle of a shrine bell to remind me this was the valley of Houghlan Ra. In that case, Dr. Gulick Habighorst's words could be excused.

I thought them over as I spat and fingered the insects out of my mouth. Believe me, that unexpected speech from this bewhiskered old gnome with the Santa Claus pack was no ordinary oration. I had expected a nimble sales talk about the unexcelled values of the pots or pans or books or vacuum cleaners or safety razors he must certainly be carrying in his bundle.

His deft mention of "Lunar Electrolysis," "Atomology," "Molecules" or whatever it was had robbed the breath out of my lungs and set a stone on my tongue. Then to have him glibly recite my name and coolly announce impending perils and a miracle that could totter the world—no, it was too much for the same evening. I closed my eyes, opened them again, and was astonished beyond measure to see him still there.

"Mr. Stafford," he said gently, "I fear my words have more than startled you. Let us go into the bungalow where I can more fully explain and you can more easily understand. It would be better to talk in there. I promise you, sir, you will never regret this unexpected visit of mine. Never. And you are vastly fortunate that I place confidence in you. I might say that I did take the liberty of ascertain-

ing something of your past from Lloyds, and Macklin's Business Bureau, when I was in Calcutta. Sheer chance, you see, has thrown you into this, and I am glad it is you and not some less meritorious man. All records have shown you a gentleman of unquestionable integrity. A man of no little moral stamina, I should judge, from the way you cleared that oil corner in the Wall Street exchange a few years ago. Come, then. May we go into the bungalow?"

Macklin's Business Bureau. Wall Street. Corner in oil. Mighty queer words to hear spoken in a God-forgotten place like that valley of Houghlan Ra! A million times queerer, coming so unexpectedly from the beard of that totally strange, bow-legged, goggle-eyed little man who had, I seemed, just stepped out of the moon. The palms of my hands gave an uncanny little prickle as I fumbled to untangle his words. He, in turn, chuckled cheerfully, swung his pack to back and calmly stepped into the bungalow.

He wanted, he announced, a bowl of rice and some wine or rum if there was any about. And before he opened his pack, would I be kind enough to lock the door, draw the blinds, and station Mardo with rifle in hand to guard the keyhole?

So I yelled to Bradshaw's house boys, ordering food. You can imagine I didn't have much time to think things over. For some reason I complied with his demands, when I wasn't gawping at him like a high school sophomore confronted for the first time by a new physics professor with a cock eye.

It wasn't so much like the Orient inside the bungalow, though, or I never would have believed the visit at all. And Mardo did not stand at the keyhole with a rifle in his fist. If some-

thing was going to happen I wanted to be the gentleman holding the shooting iron. Truth to tell, I didn't know but what Mephistopheles himself might step in a cloud of pink smoke out of the old man's opened bag.

HE made a queer picture hunched over a plate of curry and rice, with a fresh wine stain marking the corners of his mouth, and the light from the suspended ceiling lamp burnishing the top of his hairless head. Mardo stood stiff as bamboo at the door, and never took his eyes off the little old man. I repeat, I stood planted near the sack deposited in a corner; Maynard rifle resting in the crotch of my arm.

For some moments the old man did nothing but gobble food. His mouth, like his feet, proved enormous, and he moved his hands with an admirable celerity. Bradshaw's house boys had almost hopped out of their unsanitary skins on seeing my visitor, and I knew they had departed jungleward. But I was not thinking about them. I was thinking about Dr. Gulick Habighorst and the astounding world-shaker he claimed to have in his sack.

Pipe in mouth, he finally swung away from the table; knelt over his bundle and fumbled with the strings. Yes, the door was locked, I promised him, and the rattan blinds all drawn. Nodding and smiling, he worked his twig-like hands into the mysterious depths of his pack. Watching, I recalled his words: "I carry in my pack a secret of inestimable value," and held my gun a little tighter.

Fancy my reaction when he extracted from his sack the most innocent object in the universe. I could have shouted with laughter. Was this his secret? Was this the most amazing

miracle in all God's world! He fumbled it out of that pack, you understand, and placed it carefully on the table beside his emptied rice bowl. It was a little wicker cage; and in the cage sat a little yellow canary. The canary twittered, and Dr. Gulick Habighorst stared at me solemnly.

He cleared his throat with vast deliberation. "I," he promised me, "am without a shadow of doubt the world's greatest lunarian." He poked a bony finger at the canary; began somberly: "The moon, my friend, has a great deal to do with the business in hand. Before I go further it might be well for me to explain the part you can play.

"Ah, my friend, you can play the part of one who succors a science without friends or backing. You have the money, but your financial aid will be as nothing to the honor, power you will gain.

"Again, you chance to be located in a position where I must of necessity ask your coöperation. In short, you have come to the valley of Houglan Ra; and the valley of Houglan Ra is the most potent locale for my experiments.

"I must work here. Those who live here must sanction and abet me. For it is in this valley, my friend, that one finds the strongest moonlight, the most powerful L-Rays in the world. Moonlight in India is unadulterated, the rays reflected proving a more pristine saliency than elsewhere on the globe. To put it simply, the moonlight is brighter here than anywhere else, and brightest of all in Houglan Ra.

"It was in this valley some ten years ago I first discovered my famous L-Ray. Ah, the conditions were perfect—the rays salient. But you know of the strength of moonlight in India.

Surely you have heard of folk here becoming moon-struck, succumbing to total lunacy from sleeping out under the satellite?"

YES, I had heard of folk in India becoming moon-struck; and I was by no means certain I was not witnessing an exemplary case of the same.

The doctor talked on, giving me no chance to interrupt. Bustling over to his sack, he dug into the bag once more, rummaged around, and drew to light something that gave me a real surprise—a lens. A large, round lens that might have come from the eye of some monstrous telescope. Surely that sack of the little man was proving a veritable Pandora's Box. First it yielded a silly little canary in a wicker cage; now a huge lens that must have been five inches thick and four feet in circumference.

Reverently my astonishing little visitor placed the lens on the table beside the canary cage. Then he squatted on his chair and talked.

I cannot here set down the speech that flowed from the man's prolific beard. I only know I began to listen. Mardo listened, too. The scrawny Hindu could not possibly have understood the import of the doctor's words, but he listened just the same.

One couldn't help but listen, for that queer little dwarf with the long, long beard had a voice of pure magic. He talked and talked and talked. Now he would fondle his giant lens; now he would grab a paper from his pocket and wave mathematical formulæ under my nose.

The lamplight glistened his glasses, shone on his bald skull, played in his whispers, made a halo of the tobacco smoke weaving ropes about his head.

Every time he drove home a puissant point he would snatch the pipe out of his beard and fire a bomb of smoke at my sweating face.

I listened, I say, and the sweat began to bubble down my cheeks. The little man's wizardly voice trapped my attention and held my eye on him and on his monstrous glass lens. Quite suddenly I became aware that Dr. Gulick Habighorst had something to say. You bet he did. And when he had finished my garments were damp on my limbs, my mouth was open, my feet slept under me, and my brain was whirling dizzily under the impact of those startling words.

As for the doctor, he sat trembling with excitement, his twiglike hands a-gesture painting queer, dancy shadows down the wall, his beard panting smoke at the clouded ceiling like a white bush taken fire.

"You understand? You understand? You understand?" The words trembled from his teeth. His hands flickered under my chin. "You see? You realize what all this may mean? You comprehend the marvel, the wonder of it, the terrible power of the thing? You comprehend? You understand?"

I understood, all right enough. If what my witchlike visitor had said proved true, there was going to be a thaumaturgy worked in Houghlan Ra that *would* tremble the foundations of the universe; and I would be witness to the most amazing, the most astounding miracle of all this mad world. For the revelation amounted to this:

DR. GULICK HABIGHORST was a physicist and a lunarian—one who had devoted half a century to the study of the moon. For years he had examined the lunar phe-

nomena in all its phases. India was the ideal locale for his scientific explorations. India, where the moon shone more vividly than elsewhere on the globe; where the lunar rays were less adulterated than in other zones. A decade ago, during observations made from certain localities—particularly the valley of Houglan Ra—he had come upon an astounding discovery.

This had to do with such vastly abstruse matters as electrolysis, atomic philosophy, analytic electrodynamics, and the advanced theories of Lwigon Blenderzog—a Viennese astronomer—on the doctrine of lunar atomizations. To a former stock broker and a present seeker of tiger hides, a little deaf from quinine and buzzing at the heels, these doctrines of advanced physics were as comprehensible as calculus to a wooden Indian. But, boiled down, they were fairly simple, if true:

All matter is composed of tiny electric particles known to science as atoms. An iron bar is composed of trillions of atoms. A man's thumb is composed of atoms. A box of candy, London Bridge, a pair of pants with lace trimming the bottom, a yellow canary and its wicker cage, a grand piano, a Krupp gun, a train of cars on the Rock Island Railroad, a mustache cup, the Woolworth Building and the stenographers peopling it and the garters on their legs and the gum in their mouths all composed of nothing but atoms. Now these atoms were held together by magnetism, and if this magnetism could be made negative the atoms would fly apart and their owners vanish in an instant. If the atoms in an iron bar were once released, the iron bar would vanish. Similarly the Woolworth Building and its contents would disappear in a flash, as would a box of candy or London Bridge.

And Dr. Gulick Habighorst had uncovered the method for releasing those atoms! A shaft of unadulterated moonlight thrown through a lens ground to certain proportions would do the trick. The lens had to be made capable of catching a particular type of moonbeam, the L-Ray. Dr. Gulick Habighorst had discovered the idiosyncrasies of this L-Ray, had encountered the unadulterated moonlight necessary to the experiments, and had perfected the necessary lens.

I finally got the words out of a mouth filled with dough. "You mean that a shaft of moonlight falling through that lens you have there on the table will destroy everything on which it falls? You mean, don't you, that you could focus a spot of moonlight passing through your lens on an object, and the object would fly into oblivion? Isn't that your idea? A sort of death ray from the moon?"

"That's it! That's it! That's it!" chanted the gnome. "I set the lens up on a tripod. The moonlight will pass through it and drop a shaft of light, the L-Ray, onto the sand. Any object whatsoever, on encountering that shaft of light, becomes nil. Just vanishes, that's all. It would destroy a human body in the wink of an eye, or a building, or a tree, or a whole forest. Train it on a city and sweep the city into naught. Train it on an army, and the army vanishes from the face of the earth. A terrible, terrific, unthinkable engine of destruction it can be—or a vast power for good. Engineers wish to tear down a bridge. They flash the L-Ray on the bridge, and it is gone.

"Curiously enough, the only objects my ray fails to destroy are glass and wet sand. Why, I have not yet ascertained. But the ray cannot penetrate

and destroy glass; obviously it cannot, or the lens inducting it would be shattered in the process. Again, wet sand refuses demolition. Glass, after all, is composed of silicate sand, and there must be some power negative to the moonbeams in moist sand. Sand, then, and glass could be used as defenses against the ray. But you can imagine its ghastly potency for untold evil."

HE mopped his face, and I mopped mine.

"I've come to you," he went on, "because I need financial aid to perfect my lenses. I need at once twenty thousand pounds. Also I ask aid of you because there can be no scientific jealousy between us. You will back me as a business man."

"Doctor," I promised him, "if your lens is what you claim it to be, I will back you with the money. If you can prove to me—"

"Proof?" he squeaked. "I will I will give you proof—to-night! Now! You want to see the lens in action? Yes! To-night, then; the moon is splendid to-night. You know the river in the valley? There is a sandy bank not far from here where we shall set up the lens and experiment. You shall be shown, and satisfied. I have it! My pet canary shall contribute to the cause. That ought to be proof enough. And we can employ other objects to hand.

"We shall try bullets. Bullets cannot pass through the ray." He rubbed his palms together and chattered. "To-night you shall see for yourself. But you understand the awful peril your knowledge of this lens will place you under. There will be enemies who would sell their souls to—"

"*Sahib!*" Mardo's sudden voice made me jump as if kicked. Believe

me, I had more than forgotten the Punjabi. I swung about on him, and the expression on his face gave my spine a tweak. His Adam's apple was moving up and down, and he was pointing his skinny thumb. "*Sahib,*" he said softly, "some one watches through the screen. They have been watching for some time. Look. The screen nearest the gun rack. *Ahee!*"

Dr. Gulick Habighorst flung about on his chair like a jumping-jack. Following the native's thumb, I let a chill shiver trickle down my back. Was I victim of imagination, or did I actually see a pair of porcine black eyes fastened like shoe buttons at a crack in the rattan blind? Half a split second they were there; boring the room and those of us in it with a level, unbending scrutiny. Then they were gone.

We dashed helter-skelter out of the bungalow. Dr. Habighorst got a long-barreled revolver out from under his whiskers; and I was mighty content to hold my Maynard in my fists. But if there had been any eyes at the screen, they had vanished into the darkness. Search as we would we could discover no trace of a possible prowler.

The fat moon hung yellow as gold in the sky above the cliffs. Down where the river sneaked the jungle murmured softly. Softly on the perfume-weighted breeze stole the sweet tinkle of the temple bell.

CHAPTER III.

IN THE MOON-RAY.

FEELING myself a tinkling idiot, I carried the wicker cage housing the peeping yellow canary. Dr. Habighorst walked in the lead. He had insisted on shouldering the pack, de-

spite my offers to carry it, and once more, among the green and black and purple shadows of the jungle bottom, he appeared to be a dodo. Mardo, totting the lantern, followed the aged scientist.

All I could see of the good doctor was his ridiculous pair of legs swinging through the wavering patches of lantern light, and the bulky black shadow of his pack.

We must have made a weird picture, the three of us—a strange procession of creeping single file along that tortuous jungle path: a gnome bent double under a giant load; a skinny, stork-legged Hindu swinging a frustrated lantern; and a fat-head under a sun helmet, carrying in one fist a heavy rifle and in the other fist a highly incongruous canary cage.

The jungle was a tangle of banyans, cottonwoods, creeper-woven palm thickets, and wedges of clumpy bamboo. Here or there a slant of moonbeams happened to stab through the jungle's roof; and every time we trod a pool of moonlight lying across our path Dr. Gulick Habighorst would mumble: "Aaah!"

I must admit my nerves were getting a bit wrenchy. Mardo got going on his "Ram-ram-ramming" again, and I told him if he didn't shut that jabber back into his Adam's apple I'd give him a ram on the beak. The Hindu himself was uneasy. About every two seconds he would jerk his head and peer into the shadows and mumble in his throat.

When I asked Mardo what the devil was wrong, he reminded me of the shoe-button eyes fastened at the crack in the bungalow screen. Also, he confided, Houglan Ra was inhabited at night by the souls of the Crimson Avengers of Jehan Ji.

The Crimson Avengers of Jehan Ji were legendary bandits who had once played evil all over the valley; jolly Brahmins who owned a penchant for roasting victims over slow fires and stringing old ladies up by the thumbs. Mardo's story didn't bother me much, for I was sure such gentlemen had never owned souls.

I was considerably more uneasy about the shoe buttons at the screen. Suppose somebody had been out there, listening, and had heard the doctor's story? And, then, the doctor's story! Suppose it really happened to make sense, and the doctor really happened to be a scientist and not a gnome or a nut! In that case I was certainly becoming a tool of fate. Good Lord, what if the lens was the real thing! Way back in my mind, you see, I was pretty certain the whole business was liver trouble and too much quinine, and a dream.

I told myself it was a dream as I walked along the trail; and then I twisted my ankle on a cottonwood root and was more than reassured of total reality.

The little doctor was pretty nervous, too. Before we had set out for the river he had frantically expressed the hope that our minds had gone the better of us and we had not seen eyes peeking through the screen. It would be nothing short of tragedy for us and for the unknowing world if another party had learned the secret. Suppose a Bolshevik emissary should get predatory hands on the lens; uncover the secrets of the L-Ray. The doctor trembled at the mention of such an idea. I trembled.

It would go hard with me if the world should learn of my knowledge in this affair. But there seemed little chance of such a disaster. Houglan Ra

was out of the world; many, many miles out of the world.

I CONFESS, however, my breath came easier when we covered the three miles to the river, broke from a hedge of bamboos, and trudged down a sanded bank. Jungles at night are scarcely the jolliest roads to travel, especially when a member of one's party happens to carry in a sack on his shoulders a lens that could destroy at one focus the Woolworth Building. Dr. Habighorst scuttled across the sand; dumped his pack from his back; sought the sky with his queer glasses.

The moon had inched behind a film of smoky green cloud, and its sickly luminescence mantled the crooked river, glimmered dully on the surface of the muddy flood, and hung steamy shadows where the jungle flourished down to the water's edge.

Mardo squatted beside his lantern; never took eyes off the bamboos behind him. Gun across my knees, I crouched beside the Punjabi. Dr. Gulick Habighorst got busy with his sack. He looked for all the world like some subterranean wizard preparing an instrument for charms. Out of the sack came a tripod and a score of smaller astronomical instruments.

With elaborate care he screwed his giant lens into a drum fitted across the apex of the tripod. Erected, the tripod stood some ten feet above ground, so that the lens would shed a spot of light encompassed by the tripod legs, a spot of light that should be about eight feet in diameter.

Muttering in his whiskers, the little doctor scurried about on his spidery bowlegs; sighted the moon through an instrument not unlike a quadrant: then set the tripod in position on a fan of sand at the very lip of the river. After

adjusting the lens to an angle where it would face the moon and admit the reflected moon-rays, he stooped to slap handfuls of river water over the sand beneath the tripod. When he had done he dragged his canvas sack away from the instrument; backed away from the tripod, and came to sit beside me on the sand.

You can see the three of us, then, squatting in a row on the bank of that green, slimy river. Across the river a ridge of ink-black crags jutted raggedly against the indigo sky. Behind us hung a wall of murmurous jungle, steamy, redolent of decaying vegetation, whispery in the fetid darkness. Screened by clouds, the moon cast a weak phantom-glow, throwing ghostly shadows across the wrinkled water that lapped sibilantly against the fan of sand where the tripod stood.

Wiggling his hands at the tripod some eight feet distant, the doctor talked. He spoke of the possibilities of his L-Ray lens. Imagine a fleet of war planes armed with projectors fitted with the lens. Such planes could wing on moonlight nights over a sleeping city, focus their ray-catching lenses on a town, and sweep the town into blankness.

Imagine one man armed with such a projector. By training the ray on an enemy he could dash his victim into swift oblivion, and the world could never know.

No wonder my brain whirled; no wonder I did not believe! No wonder I thought my companion a derelict madman, a pseudo-scientist, or a quinine-phantasy.

Still, he spoke rationally. And here we were, sitting on the bank of the river, glaring at the tripod, waiting for the moon to come clear and light the lens, and prove!

"While we await the passing of the clouds," I heard the doctor saying, "let us come to an understanding, Reven Staffard." He turned his goggles on me; stroked his beard with gentle fingers. "I have picked you to be my partner; have chosen you from a world of souls quite at random. It was the only way. But I must have some manner of security.

"First, you must swear you will not, until such time as I see fit, reveal a single item of the phenomena you are about to witness. You must vow never to speak a single word to a single soul. Your Hindu boy will not understand, and is therefore safe.

"Of course, you cannot rob from me my lens. You might desire so to do, when you see it in action. But in your unpracticed hands it would prove useless. You do not know the exact angle at which it must be set. You do not know at which moon-phase it could become potent. I have salvaged the glass with a chemical compound known only to me, without which the lens is impotent. Thus I am defended from theft of my secret.

"But to perfect my lenses I need money. Can you write me a check? Can you give me a sum of gold when you have seen this experiment? Could you arrange for me this added security? Listen. I will give you a demonstration to-night. You will be convinced. After this demonstration you will give me, say, ten thousand pounds—a check or gold. I will return to my laboratories in Calcutta. You will stay here. I return in a month's time. Meantime you have kept absolute silence. Then when I come back with my augmented apparatus we can journey farther into the hills, experiment further, and finally go to Berlin to disseminate our powers.

"Of that business development we can speak later. Just now I desire a gesture of security. I will demonstrate my lens. Will you award me the money and the promise of absolute silence?"

"If your lens will—er—make things like iron bars vanish," I admitted,

"I will promptly give you a check for ten thousand pounds. I will give you a check for twenty thousand pounds. I will write you the check here and now. I will return to the bungalow and hand you cash to the amount of five hundred pounds as a starter."

If his lens would work, it was worth a million pounds. But I was chuckling in my throat. Of course the thing was a fake. No doubt it would fail in its demonstration, the doctor would frantically claim a misadjustment or something, pack up his bag and disappear. Might as well humor the queer little lunatic. Of course he had a bolt loose in that copper dome of his.

"Agreed," he chuckled. "Listen, my friend. While we await the coming of the moon, would it not be well to go to your bungalow and get me those bank notes? Then, after the demonstration, I could depart at once for Calcutta.

"With the notes and your check and your vow of secrecy!" He seemed suddenly possessed of an electric vigor. "I could pack up and leave at once. I would not even stay to sleep. I have awaited financial succor so long, so long. The money. We are joint partners, then."

He thrust out his hand. I clutched it. It was dry as a twig. Mardo tapped on my shoulder, hunched closer, and whispered in my ear:

"But, *sahib*, there is evil down the wind. Evil. We are in great danger, *sahib*. Do not join this man and his

enterprise. Danger! The souls of the Crimson Avengers flee on the jungle's breath."

I hopped around and got a clutch on that skinny rascal's throat. This mad affair had finally yanked my nerves into shreds. I wanted to tell that bearded little nut to pack up and go to hell. I wanted to choke the nonsense out of Mardo. I was letting a maniac and a night in the jungle make an idiot out of me, too. A death ray from the moon. Bah! A native who felt things invisible with his fingertips. Bah! Too much quinine! Too much quinine!

"Shut up that blithering Crimson Avenger nonsense, Mardo!" I yelped into his brass-colored Hindu face. "Pick up your lantern. We're getting out of here. I'm a fool to have stayed so long. I'm going back to the bungalow and get some sleep. What a fairy tale I've fallen for!" I jerked around on the man who called himself Dr. Gulick Habighorst.

"I've had enough of this fool racket!" I snarled. "Yes, doctor, I have faith in your lens. Sure I have. Be a good little boy and come back to the bungalow with us and—"

"The moon!" shrieked the doctor. Like a marionette suddenly jerked by all its wires, he bounced to his feet, got a finger into the air, and pointed at the sky. "The moon! The moon! The moon!" His voice echoed and re-echoed among the black crags across the river. "The moon! The moon! The moon!"

Sure enough, the moon. Those smoky green clouds had crawled away, and the moon sailed free against the vaulted dome of night, shedding its spectral rays down on the green river and the purple jungles and the ragged ridge of crags.

The silvery moonglow flung a shimmering shine across the water; made of the river a burbling, sneaking road of mercury. Far away a jackal howled, and the cliffs across the water howled too.

"The lens!" bawled the doctor's beard.

And the crags made phantom answer: "The lens!"

Truly enough, the lens. The moonlight shafted through the glass and cast a violet-hued spot of light on the fan of sand. The doctor's splayed bare feet were dancing intricate steps under his bulbous belly; his hands were dodging like excited little bats under my nose. Suddenly they dived under his beard, and came out clutching a fountain pen and a check book.

"Write me a check!" he shrilled. "Write me a check, make your vow of a month's silence, and I'll prove, I'll demonstrate, I'll prove!"

I KNEW at the time it was all too queer to be real; but I got the check book into my fumbly fingers and somehow or other managed to scrawl my signature under a note for fifty thousand pounds. By thunder, if his lens didn't work, I'd snatch that check out of his hands and stand on no gentle ceremony about his glasses, but smash him a whack on the nose!

He rammed the check into his pocket; yelped at me to lift a hand heavenward and swear to keep the secret of the night's proceedings. I lifted a fist at the sky, and swore out loud to never reveal the goings-on of that mad evening. Under my breath I added a few extra oaths for good measure.

I could hear Mardo swearing behind me. The skinny Hindu had dodged away from the lens and the tripod as if they had been anathema. He stood

backed to a hedge of banyans, and his scarecrow carcass was quivering like the bones of a skeleton in a gibbet I could hear the click of his chattering teeth, and I could hear the "ram-rams" stammering out of his jellied throat.

But I wasn't paying Mardo much attention, you can bet on that. I was glaring at Dr. Gulick Habighorst of the glassy, dollar-round eye, and the Niagara-like beard and spidery leg. I was glaring at the little scientist and glaring at his lens and the moon-ray cast by that lens. And the sweat leaked in rivers down my face, the feeling abandoned the palms of my hands, and the knees turned to water under me.

What do you suppose had happened? Dr. Gulick Habighorst had dodged up close to the tripod; turned on me a smile of triumph. And before my popping eyes he had flung his fountain pen at the moonbeams flooding in a tinted cone out of the lens. I say he flung the fountain pen. Yes, he did. I saw it in his fingers as he threw. He stood close to the lens and tripod, but he was mighty careful not to let his hand dodge into that shaft of inducted light. The pen flashed out of his fingers into the lens-shed rays—and disappeared.

Fountain pens—and this is not an advertisement—have, no doubt, put over some great ideas in their days. Fountain pens have signed well-meaning peace treaties, death warrants, billions of checks. But no fountain pen ever put over such a monstrous, momentous idea as was put over by that fountain pen which had vanished from the fingers of Dr. Gulick Habighorst, wielded in that lost, India-tainted valley of Houglan Ra.

I had just signed a check with that fountain pen, and it was just such a

pen as inks the fingers of schoolboys every day. It had vanished under the rays of a lens set on a tripod on a fan of sand lapped by a jungle river. Vanished into nothingness—disappeared before a second could tick!

Right then I saw in my addled mind a livid picture. Buildings whisked into oblivion; men blotted out while they strolled a street; armies swept away into moonbeams. Blown, as Dr. Gulick Habighorst put it, into atoms. Reduced to electrons. Flicked into whiffs of ether.

I GLARED at Dr. Habighorst, at the tripod and the pool of moonlight cast by the lens on the sand, at the bony fingers which had held and thrown the fountain pen, at the moon bowling down the indigo sky overhead. A chuckle eeked from the doctor's whiskers, and he patted one of the tripod legs with an affectionate hand.

Moving sick feet, I edged toward the improbable instrument. The bewhiskered scientist turned his spectacles on me; stared owlshly; clucked like a hen.

"You begin to believe? You see those violet-tinted beams falling from my lens? You understand them, now; realize their unnatural power? Yes! They can whirl anything into nothingness—anything. Anything, as I previously explained, save glass and wet sand. Suppose you were to fall under that lens, into that shaft of light. You would vanish, Reven Staffard, like candle-flame brushed by a tornado. Suppose I were to walk into that cone of beams. There would be nothing left of me. Nothing except," he chuckled, "my glasses, of course."

He brushed a sleeve across his skull. With all the respect in the world I

eyed his instrument. As yet I could not grapple with the tremendous import of the thing. What a shock such an instrument was going to deal the world. What power those who exploited it were going to own. Dizzy speculations throbbed through my mind.

"Look again," my companion murmured.

Brushing aside his beard, he fumbled fingers over his chest and tore a brass button from his linen jacket. For a moment he studied the brass button, holding it in the tips of his fingers.

"Watch closely," he advised.

I watched. He cautiously stretched his hand toward the ray that fell between the tripod's legs. A snap of the fingers.

The brass button was gone!

"There are nine brass buttons left on my jacket," he lectured impressively. "They would all vanish under the L-Ray thrown by my lens. Nine skyscrapers in the heart of New York could be vanished as readily. Buttons and buildings are composed of atoms. My ray disintegrates those atoms. Buttons and buildings disappear under the ray. So do you and I. Let us try again."

His words and his fingers quaked with excitement. Once again he dived a hand under his beard; yanked from his jacket his long-barreled revolver. "Look you, my friend. Bullets cannot pass through the ray. But let us try. Watch."

Gun in fist, he swung around and aimed at an object floating down the moon-illuminated breast of the stream. It looked like a log, but it wasn't a log. I caught the gleam of ghoulis eyes set in knobs poked above water, and a long, knobby snout. The gun in the doctor's withered hand jerked, ex-

ploded, and spat flame. The echoes of the shot caromed down the crags, and a spout of water spurted where the bullet struck close to the crocodile's snout.

The doctor handed the revolver to me. "Get behind the tripod," he instructed. "Have the ray fall between your gun muzzle and your mark out there in the river. See if you can drive a bullet between the legs of the tripod. Try a shot."

I placed myself in such a position that it would be necessary for the fired bullet to whiz through the light falling from the lens. I fired. No bullet went farther than that cone of violet light. No spout of water jumped on the breast of the stream. I handed the revolver back to its owner, grabbed off my sun helmet and fanned a sweating face.

Through buzzing ears I heard the old man offer to try again. Once more he shot a bullet at the sand and dug a smoking hole near his toe. Again he aimed at the spot of light under the tripod and fired. No bullet disturbed the wet sand flooded by the circle of light. There was no hole. And it didn't dry my face for me, either.

"ALL right, Reven Staffard?" the doctor was asking softly. "Are you convinced? You saw what happened to the fountain pen, to the brass button, to the bullets. Good. But let us try a living object. Let us see if my ray from my lens can destroy the animate, can blow to atoms and make to vanish a body of life. My canary. Let us, as a final test, try my canary. It lives, it breathes, moves. You can hear it sing."

The bird was singing as he spoke. Petrified, I stood gaping at the tripod while the doctor ducked away and

came back with the wicker cage in his hand. I didn't want to see that tiny object of life flickered out by a mere spot of lens-thrown moonbeams. But I couldn't take my eyes from the thing. My throat was knotting in my neck and the pulse drumming in my temples as my wizard of a companion stretched the bird cage toward the tripod. The canary dodged and skipped and trilled in its tiny prison. For a moment the old man studied the moon, watched the canary, turned his owlish, glassy gaze on me.

My feet were lead, and a thunder-clap wouldn't have taken my fascinated gaze from the cage in those twig-like hands.

Suddenly the old man squawked. "Now!" His hand whipped out. Canary and cage must have sailed right under my sweat-leaking nose. Canary and cage were gone!

The voice from the white beard was solemn as a funeral knell. "Vanished under the L-Ray. Cage. Canary. Gone. Blown to atoms, to oblivion. And now that you know, now that you are sworn to secrecy, now that you have given me the money and I can return to cash your check in Calcutta and buy instruments, chemicals, apparatus to—"

I think we both must have heard the sound at the same instant. I don't quite know how it was. At any rate, we whirled about like a pair of dancers timed to music on a stage. That sound! That queer, gurgling, giggling sound!

We jumped around on our heels, forgot the tripod and the lens and the L-Ray. My sun helmet dropped from my nerveless fingers and rolled at my boots. A rattly, crackly cry shook from the doctor's snowy beard, and his face went the color of banana meat.

It was Mardo. We had forgotten

the native. We remembered him now. He had been standing, his back to the hedge of banyans. Now he was sitting, back to the hedge of banyans. His arms hung limp at his sides. His legs were spread apart and his toes pointing stiffly at the sky. He had thrown back his head to look at the moon, but he wasn't looking at the moon.

The moon was looking at Mardo. It was painting his face the most nauseous yellow tinge conceivable. And it was making to gleam the rivers of red enamel that welled from the Adam's apple of Mardo's gaunt throat. Never again would Mardo mumble a prayer to Rama, seventh incarnation of Vishnu, out of that Adam's apple. A knife had cut it to the core.

CHAPTER IV,

MAD COMBAT.

MAYBE the souls of the Crimson Avengers of Jehan Ji had done it. Right then, in the valley of Houglan Ra, I could have believed any fairy story. But I remembered the eyes that had been at the screen at the bungalow; and believe me, it was easy to imagine a very human hand creeping out of those banyans to draw a knife across an unwary Hindu's throat.

Mardo's finger tips had failed him at the time of need. I knew why. He had been watching a gnome make objects vanish under a tripod. Better finger tips than Mardo's would have failed under such circumstances.

Dr. Gulick Habighorst had turned into a cartoon made of stone, and Heaven only knows the occult power that pleased to loan vitality to my own poor feet. But I hopped over to my Maynard rifle in no short order. I

wanted to feel that gun in my fist, and I wanted it badly. Mardo looked like the very devil spraddled against those banyans with blood pumping out of his neck and rippling down over his ribs.

The doctor got a whistly screech out of his beard.

"His throat's cut! His throat's cut! Somebody cut his throat!" The ragged crags across the river screeched in turn. "His throat's cut! His throat's cut! Somebody cut his throat! Cut his throat!"

I'm not a brave man, and never was. I can't talk smartly back to New York cops with faces like Hamburg steaks. Once, at Contalmaison, I got an idea a Boche raiding party was coming over to cut up my telephone station, and I ran so fast I almost caught up with the colonel. But courage is a flighty emotion; goes hand in hand with rage. And I was mad as a hatter about that Punjabi. His prayers and predilections might have prickled my neck at times, but he had been half around the Orient with me, and his curry and rice and loyalty had been the best in the world.

Sobbing with fury, I dashed into the banyans, intent on riddling with bullets the first human in sight. There weren't any humans in sight among the banyans, though. It was black as a witch's curse in there. I yelled, and kicked among mats of vines and roots, scratched my face to ribbons, tore my legs in brambles, whipped at every shadow with the barrel of my gun.

My uproar started a legion of bats into flight, small animals whisked under foot, and a heron or something went hooting past my head like an evil thought.

In half a minute I was floundering in a pool of cobalt darkness, struggling with nobody but myself. After I had

walked into a spider web and hung a thick veil across my face I was not too sure about the Crimson Avengers after all. There couldn't have been any other human beings in that jungle of Houghlan Ra. Human beings wouldn't have—

Then I heard a scream. A human scream, if a scream from Dr. Gulick Habighorst could have been termed human.

The dolorous wail coiled through the banyans, coming from the beach by the river. "Help! Help, Reven Staf-fard, save me! Sa-a-a-ve me-e-e!"

Thrashing like a maniac, I fought back to the river bank; plunged from the banyans almost at the spot where what was left of Mardo sat in a puddle of blood.

There was the doctor, jiggling and dodging on one side of the tripod. His revolver was in his fist, and he was yelping like a terrified poodle and moving as St. Vitus never had moved. And dodging and jiggling—it was like a game of tag, I swear—on the other side of the tripod was a squatty-built man clad in a white cotton suit. In one hairy fist he waved an automatic; in the other fist a drippy knife. His eyes were shoe buttons glowing from the shadow of his sun helmet brim. His purple face was as German as the war-time mustache of Kaiser Wilhelm.

"SO!" he was bellowing. "You haf a German name, und you plan to sell this instrument of death to dot Yankee! *Himmel!* Traitor! It is to me you sell dot lens. Berhaps I kill you und take it myself. I heard you. Und I saw dot lens vork, yess! Und I take it back with me to Germany. Für Deutschland! *Ach, Gott!* Me und Schmitt, ve grab it. *Ja!*"

"I never saw you before!" the doctor bawled. "Get away from here! You can have the lens. To hell with the lens. Don't touch me with that knife. Help! I'm going to be murdered. Save me! Save me!" His voice attained an astonishing falsetto. "Save me! Stalfard!"

Flinging rifle to shoulder, I stepped over Mardo's red legs and pumped a bullet at the German's purple countenance. Whether I missed aim or the bullet was dissolved by the rays from the tripod lens, I don't know. Dr. Habighorst's assailant was playing a furious ring-around-the-rosy, trying to catch the doctor, trying to keep away from the spot of light under the tripod.

At the sound of my gun he went up in the air like a jack-rabbit and let a livid squall out of his lungs.

"Your bullets von't go through the ray," he yelled, scrambling to keep the tripod between his bulk and my gun. Dodging suddenly, he let go a shot from the automatic that knocked a chip out of my ear. I tried to get a bead on him as he did so. The next instant a heavy missile clubbed against my spine and flung me sprawling; knocked the rifle from my hands. I got to my feet in time to get a flat stone in the face, and the next moment I was grappling with another white cotton suit and German face.

This second German had popped out of the brambles behind me. The shock of his rush sent us rolling in frenzied embrace; knocked the wind out of me. I should have noted the first German's mention of Schmitty. I had been so astonished at finding one German in the valley of Houglan Ra I had not noticed anything. However, I was now giving No. 2 my full attention.

He got a scissors hold on me, and I thumped manfully at his face. Then

he worked a half Nelson while I busily kicked his shins. Clutched together, we rolled down the sand to the water's edge and back again, floundered into a mess of brambles and out again, pounded and whacked and gouged and tore and scratched. Once Mardo got mixed up in the wrestling match. That wasn't nice—it wasn't nice at all. We got rid of Mardo, gained our feet, toppled back to the sand.

After a brief scrabble I found myself on top. My enemy had my hands pinned under me, my ankles twisted with his, and my face pressed into his yellow mop of hair.

I had his face rammed hard into the sand, and had only to await his speedy suffocation. Neither of us chose to move, and there we sprawled. This gave me a chance to see the gnomelike scientist and German No. 1 grappling in a little wrestle of their own. It didn't take me long to see what they were trying to do. Each was battling to shove the other under the tripod! Both were fighting like fury; and the German was busily trying to thrust his knife into the doctor's abdomen while the doctor strove to prevent it.

Back and forth and around the tripod they fought. Now they were knee-deep in the river, churning the water to lather; now they were struggling across the sand, cursing, gasping, panting oaths. The German had a black fist in the doctor's snowy whiskers. The doctor had a thumb in the German's left eye. Every once in a while they would rock against the tripod; dance away squealing.

DURING that titanic encounter a queer thing happened. Desperate as was my own situation, I noticed it. A thin silver cigarette case fell from the doctor's coat; was kicked

under their tramping feet. I swear, that little fighting dwarf went crazy. With insane strength he battled out of the German's grasp, stooped, snatched up that cigarette case, popped it into his jacket.

What was the fool doing? My Maynard, an automatic, and his own revolver lay within reach on the sand; and he had grabbed up that trifling trinket.

I bawled at him; told him to get hold of a gun. Too late. The German was on top of him like a wild cat. His spidery legs crumpled under him and he fell with a shriek. What's more, he came within half a foot of going into the pool of moonlight under the tripod. It brought six curses out of my teeth when I thought of what would happen should either of those battling maniacs roll into the shaft of light dropped by the lens.

Well, the little old man wasn't going to last long under the German's pounding fists. Blood leaked into the white whiskers, burbling from his mouth. His flailing hands had become scarlet twigs. His big bare feet looked like puddings, smashed by the German's stamping boots. The crags across the sneaky river echoed with his soprano screams.

But he was putting up an astonishing battle. He kept fighting the German away from the tripod. He clawed that Teutonic countenance into a bloody ham. He fought like a jaguar, and the German fought like a gorilla. The moonlight gleamed on their writhing bodies.

Mardo's corpse, recumbent near the banyans, looked on. A gavial jabbed its knobby eyes out of the river near shore, and looked on. Pinned to the ground atop my enemy, I looked on. They were fighting, those men. Fight-

ing for the possession of a power that would shake the foundations of the world.

Suddenly I found my lungs strong with breath; knew it was time to aid the doctor. With a savage wrench I loosed my enemy's hold on my hands. We rolled over. He kicked a terrible hold, his legs on mine. I went down, bent into a knot, twisted into a painful contortion. His hands trapped my throat. My hands fastened on his neck. Face pressed to face, legs tangling, bodies locked, we staggered and went lurching across the sand in a macabre dance.

Whirling faster and faster, we went crashing into the banyans, floundering off in the darkness, battling among the trees, away from the bank of the river. He didn't loosen his choking grip, nor did I loosen mine. I couldn't see. The tongue swelled in my mouth. The roof of my head burst into flames. My arms, legs, feet died. We went down together. Vines lashed our feet; darkness closed in.

IMPossible to tell how long I lay there in the darkness, fighting for the breath that would bring me life, holding in an iron clutch a corpse. For the German had become a corpse. His lungs had given out first, and his fingers had unhooked their strangling hold.

I knew he was dead, for his body had turned to sponge. I didn't want to lie there beside him, but for a long time I couldn't get up. Wet vines brushed my face. The smell of moldy jungle earth and mud and blood and sweat plugged my nostrils. I could catch a faint odor of orchid, too.

That dreadful creature sprawled beside me had, on recent occasion, been chewing cloves. I remember wonder-

ing where he had obtained the cloves. I remember wondering, too, where those two Germans had come from. Memory yanked me out of a coma, and abruptly I heard the screams.

They came from the direction of the river. Long, drawn-out screams, and shrill. Like the banshee whoops of ambulance sirens pulsing into midnight. Screams that froze the blood in my veins and made me fight to move my legs. I couldn't move those legs—not for a long time. I had come within an ace of being choked to death, and my legs just wouldn't forget it. It wasn't jolly to lie there on the floor of that Houglan Ra jungle beside a spongy German corpse smelling of cloves while those awful wails twisted out of the dark. It was the rottenest sensation in the world.

How I tried to get to my feet! When I finally did manage to stand on legs of warm rubber the screaming had ceased to be. There were echoes. Echoes tossed by ragged black crags. Echoes out of a past. Whether that past was ten minutes, ten years, or ten hours I have never been able to determine.

Somehow—it took years—I fought my way out of the banyan jungle, and after a dizzy eternity knew I was standing on the bank of the river. Yes, I was on the sandy river shore. There was the river, murmuring off through the flower-scented gloom. There were the crags across the mercury-colored flood. Crags whence voices, shadowy, tiny voices, lingered to wail. Black, raggedy crags stabbing at an indigo sky.

The moon lurked low in that indigo sky, I noticed. Soon it would be gone. But it was bright enough for me. It illumined the face of my dead Punjabi lying like an emptied scarecrow at the

edge of the thicket. It scattered its ethereal rays down the river bank and picked out such objects as the doctor's emptied sack, my Maynard rifle, the doctor's long-barreled revolver, a German automatic strewn across the sand.

I noticed, besides, the lantern Mardo had carried, still upright and flickering bravely where first it had been set down. And I wanted to notice something else, but I didn't. I stared, wildly sought the shadows bounding the jungle's rim. I hunted the thickets with my eye. At long last I began to shout.

"Doctor!" I caterwauled. "Dr. Gulick Habighorst! Oh, doctor, where are you?" And the crags across the river wailed: "Oh, doctor! Where are you? Are you? You?"

That was the only answer. No—there was one other. I glared. I glared and my heart became a turnip and the blood in my veins turned to milk. I saw the answer. There were footprints spattered all over the fan of sand where the tripod stood. The footprints of fighting men. But there were not any footprints under that tripod standing close to the water's edge. The spot of moon-ray shed through the lens onto the sand didn't show a single footprint. It simply made a violet-tinted circle on the sand.

The sand had been disturbed; there was a mark there. There I saw an imprint that could only have been made by two bodies, locked in fighting embrace, and fallen between the legs of the tripod.

Those bodies might have rolled on into the river, but I knew they had not. Bodies would vanish to nothingness under that tripod where the violet spot of moonlight lay.

The spot of light cast by the lens

on the sand showed the mark where those bodies had flopped. The bodies had gone. Only one object remained. I crept up closer, panting, like a boy sneaking up on a snake. I stared, and the object stared back at me. Stared owlishly, reflecting the moonlight. I wanted to die, I can tell you. I glared at those glistening eyes, and wanted to die.

The story was told. There in the center of that lens-shed spot of light lay—the doctor's glasses.

"Two objects resist the ray," I remember whispering to myself. "Two objects refuse demolition under the lens—wet sand, and glass."

Then the Maynard was in my hand, and the moon had gone. I raised my rifle and pulled the trigger. Once—twice. Again. The third shot went home, and the great glass lens exploded in a shower of winging slivers. Clutching the rifle to my chest, I galloped into the banyans and started a race for the bungalow.

CHAPTER V.

THE MOON SETS.

NO, I did not bag my tiger and obtain prize gavial skins up there in the valley of Hougla Ra. The fact is, I didn't stay. I didn't wait for the arrival of my friend Bradshaw. The truth is, I hiked out of Hougla Ra, and I must have made a pretty wild hike, because I ended up in a mission hospital in Pangalore. Was I in the mission hospital a week, or was it six? I've quite forgotten. But I must have had it seriously. The head of the institution told me I came wandering into town as mad as a March hare.

He called me into his office and told

me about it on the day I was discharged and to leave for Bombay. He told me I had raved like a fool about a gnome and a dodo. He told me I had chattered for hours on end—delirium of the worst kind—about a certain lens that would capture an L-Ray and obliterate a building or a canary in a cage. He told me I had raved about Hindus with cut throats, about unknown Germans who chewed cloves, and about men who had been blown to atoms.

Do you know what he said to me?

"Staffard," he said, "it's a wonder you're alive. You've been insane for days. You came marching into Pangalore one morning, ragged and crazy as a starved *fakir*. Know what I think? I'm wondering if you hadn't been wandering about those Hougla Ra jungles late at night. It looked to me as if you'd gotten a bit moonstruck."

HOLMES BRADSHAW, the gaunt Kelantan naturalist, let out a monster oath when he caught sight of me at the other end of the hotel veranda. He came wading through the crowd like a mad mother in a jammed kindergarten, and he stepped on a fat coffee planter's bad corn and didn't turn around to apologize.

"Staffard!" he yelled. "Reven Staffard, no less!" He was cracking the knuckles of my hand. "I say, you damned idiot, where the devil you been? How come you're back here in Bombay? And what in the name of the Seven Flat Cats of Assasta happened up there at my place in Hougla Ra? I couldn't find a house boy on the premises. The bungalow was run to rot—doors left open, guns stolen, specimens wandered off. And, say, listen!" His hand crushed mine. He

made a hoarse, hot whisper of his voice.

"There'd been hell to pay up there. Murder, no less. By Heaven, I found some weird things up there. A fresh vulture-picked skeleton down on a beach by the river! And some other things I've got to show you. What the devil went on? I shot the biggest tiger I've ever seen back in the jungle, and down on the river I knocked off the world's biggest crocodile. You've got to come up to my room where we can talk. I've got to talk to you, Staffard! Up to my room! Right away!"

Once in his room he dashed around like an excited boy. I sat in a chair near a window. I was sick to my heels, I can tell you that. He had some things he wanted to show me, and he showed them.

And everything he exhibited made me sicker. He dug those awful exhibits out of a box from under his bed. A tripod. A canvas sack containing a scatter of queer, astronomical instruments. A German automatic, orange with rust. A long-barreled revolver, tarnished to the color of grass. My cheeks must have also tarnished to the color of grass as Bradshaw placed those exhibits, one by one, in a row on the floor at my feet. But the naturalist didn't notice.

"Look at that stuff," he panted. "If that isn't the damnedest! I picked up that truck down on the beach along the river. Scattered all around. There was a human skeleton lying there, I tell you, and all this truck strewn over the sand. Tripod standing near the water's edge.

"It's got my brain stopped, I tell you. This revolver, for example." He picked up the doctor's revolver; broke open the cartridge chamber. "Here's a mystery for you, by Heaven. Look

at the shells in this thing. Every other one was a blank cartridge. What the hell?"

Yes, what the hell? Every other shell a blank cartridge! What the hell, indeed! Do you remember? First the doctor fired the gun; his bullet struck. Then I fired the gun; my bullet never did! Every other shell in that tarnished long-barreled revolver was a blank! I stared at that revolver, and my brain turned a flip-flop under my hair. Bradshaw was talking again.

"Now, listen," he was demanding. "This whole thing is queer, terrible. Something awful must have taken place down on the beach. First of all, what became of the two German chaps I sent up there to go shooting with you? Did you see them at all?" The naturalist's voice was shaky. "I'm wondering if you ever saw 'em? I say, Staffard, we've got to clear this up! They were friends of mine—Brokmann and Schmitt. Collectors. I met 'em in Allahabad, and sent 'em up to stay with you until I came.

"Both good fellows. Old German war veterans. Never got over the war. A bit cracked on this fatherland stuff. Brokmann had been on Hindenburg's staff. But fine chaps, just the same. I sent 'em up there to stay with you, and now—"

For a long, long minute Bradshaw couldn't speak. "I reckon they're dead. Couldn't find a trace of Schmitt. But that automatic on the beach was Brokmann's. I've come to the conclusion that skeleton must have been Schmitt. And look—"

OUT from under the bed he dragged a crocodile skin. Hardly necessary for me to state my brain was so paralyzed by that time I didn't have the gray matter to wonder

what that crocodile hide had to do with it. Bradshaw held up the smoke-colored hide. His voice came out of a deep and distant well.

"See this gavial skin? Twenty-two feet long! I was picking up that stuff on the sand when this monster floated by on the surface of the river. Couldn't resist. Got him with one shot. That stuff on the beach wasn't the half of it! Look at this!"

He was almost shouting. I could hardly hear him. I was staring through a lemon-colored mist. He had dropped the gavial skin; yanked a tin box out of his jacket, and dumped a little heap of junk into his palms. Junk, he called it. Junk? It wasn't junk to me! It hung the eyes almost out of my head. He handed the pieces to me, one by one; and I clutched them in fingers made of brittle ice.

"It's the damnedest litter of junk I've ever seen," he said. "A fountain pen; ten brass buttons; a belt buckle; a German war cross. That Iron Cross belonged to Brokmann, by Heaven! And this cigarette case. And this queer little folding box of sticks. By golly, Staffard, the whole thing has got me stumped forty ways! Just look at that junk! And wait till you see what that folding box of sticks does. Wait till you hear where that stuff came from. Where do you think, Staffard?"

"I found that junk in the stomach of that crocodile I shot. That junk was in the gavial's stomach. In the gavial's stomach! Think of it, man—in that monster gavial's stomach! Think of it!"

I thought of it. I thought of that monster gavial's stomach. Lord knows why my heart didn't stop. I guess it did, for a few minutes. In those icicle fingers of mine I slowly turned the objects that had come out of that huge

crocodile's stomach. A fountain pen. Ten brass buttons—*ten* of them! A belt buckle. A German war cross that had belonged to Brokmann. A silver cigarette case. And a little folding box of sticks that could do something queer.

I glared at that folding box of sticks. My fingers must have pressed a lever, for the folding box of sticks *did* do something queer. The rest of the junk went clattering from my hands; and I found myself holding a little wicker canary cage. A tiny object no bigger than a pearl dropped from those magical wicker sticks. I didn't say it was a pearl—I said it was no bigger than a pearl. It was the skull of a canary!

BRADSHAW'S voice—the echo of a ghost's echo—was saying:

"Only the devil knows what these things can mean. What was that tripod? What could have been going on down there on the sandy beach? There must have been a third party. Say this third party had been fighting with Schmitt and Brokmann. That's the way it looked. He killed Schmitt, and that was Schmitt's skeleton." It was not. It was Mardo's skeleton. "Anyway, he had fought Brokmann. While they fought together they rolled under the tripod thing."

"There was a pair of glasses lying under the tripod, by the way. Must have been knocked from this third party's nose. At any rate, they rolled under the tripod and right out into the river. And it just happened so this giant gavial I shot swam along and grabbed 'em both while they were under the river."

He mopped his face, which looked like a wet pear. "That junk from the gavial's stomach was in their pockets,"

he whispered on. "The belt buckle and Iron Cross Brokmann always wore. Whose that other stuff was, God only knows. That fountain pen, those buttons, that trick cage, that cigarette case."

Indeed, God alone knew to whom those articles belonged; and He chose to reveal. Somehow or other I had dropped the magic cage to pick up the thin silver cigarette case. It was the one the doctor had dropped and snatched back to his bosom. Perhaps my thumb nail snapped it open. At any rate, it opened.

It did not contain cigarettes. Apparently its owner had used it as a safety-deposit vault for valuable papers. An aged, yellow newspaper clipping fell to the floor. My sick fingers unfolded the clipping, and my sick eyes read the following item:

Daniel Perry, former vaudeville entertainer, wanted for extraordinary

astronomy swindle. Obtains money from wealthy Back Bay science devotee by exceedingly involved scheme exposed by Harvard physicist. Posing as a—

There was a photograph of Daniel Perry heading the column. That was all I wanted of that! Another strip of paper, unwadded, proved to be my check for fifty thousand pounds. The check with which that lunarian was going to depart for Calcutta while I kept silent for a month. The third sheet of paper, unfolded, disclosed a faded lithographing. A handbill. The photograph at the top of the handbill was identical with that on the newspaper clipping. Bald head, beard, owlish glasses and all. The picture of Dr. Gulick Habighorst.

Writ large beneath it was the legend: "All This Week. Professor Daniel Perry Habighorst. Master Mystifier. King of Conjuring. World's Greatest Magician."

THE END.

U U U

The Teredo

THE teredo is a wormlike mollusc about six inches long and three-eighths of an inch thick, with a soft body, but a very hard head that ends in a pair of mandibles that are perfect augers and can bore a hole in the hardest wood. If the teredo, or shipworm, confined its activities to derelict hulks it would be a blessing, but it destroys not only the hulls of wooden ships, but pilings, wharves and anything that is not sheathed in metal or chemically treated. Wood soaked in creosote is immune for awhile, but the teredo finds a way to destroy it in the end. The dry dock at Port Royal was wrecked by teredos, and when Baltimore extended its sewers into the bay the teredos attacked dock timbers, piles and wharves all along the water front.

The Quiros, a wooden gunboat, ran on a Southern Pacific reef; when placed in dry dock for repairs four months later only a slight fracture was found in the copper sheathing, but the teredo had entered through the hole and almost destroyed the boat. This little worm has destroyed more derelicts than the Navy Department has ever done, but it is the greatest pest of the sea.

Minna Irving.



"Ride, or I'll shoot!" she screamed, waving the empty gun

War Above the Timber Line

Virtue is its only reward along the Texas border where Clem Saddler battles the loose-roping riders of the Indian country

By J. E. GRINSTEAD

Author of "Signed 'Scada,'" "The Saga of Silver Bend," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

CLEM SADDLER, top hand of old Wash Baines's Bar 6 ranch on the Texas side of the Red River, is a good man with a gun; which is lucky, for just across the river, in the Indian country is the Bar 600 ranch of the Folder brothers. Hard-bitten and lawless, Bent and the other Folder brothers have been seen running Bar 6 into Bar 600 on cattle strayed or driven across the river; and everybody knows a showdown is imminent.

Clem is in Lone Elm, on the Texas

side, when Lake Evers, leader of a crowd of loafers and suspicious characters, forces him to fight. Clem shoots Evers, and then, with his side-kick Howdy, stands off the gang, led now by the cold-blooded Berry Young. Realizing that Young must be allied with the Folder gang, Clem and Howdy ride back to the Bar 6 to prepare against an attack. Wash Baines and his wife Nora are bravely ready to face whatever may come; and their niece from the East, Ellie Baines, begins to wonder

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if her first angry judgment of Clem Saddler, as her uncle's "pet killer," was not unjust.

CHAPTER IV.

ELLIE LEARNS WHAT RIDING MEANS.

CLEM went on back to the bunk house with the cartridges, and afterward joined the other men at the corral. Ellie stood at a window and watched him and wondered. So those were cowboys. They didn't look like cowboys to her. Several of them were gray-haired and looked as old as Uncle Wash. Even the younger ones looked old, with odd, grim lines in their faces, and narrowed eyes.

Why did they call them cowboys, she wondered. Why not cowmen? One, she had noticed, was the oddest man she had ever seen. His hair and eyebrows were so white and his eyes so light that he reminded her of an Albino she had seen in a show. He had been standing near Clem, when she went to the corral. His face was that of a clown, only his mouth looked as if he were about to cry, instead of laugh.

Ellie was still looking out the window toward the corral, and wondering at the things the men were doing with ropes and the like, when Wash Baines called her. She went into the other room. Aunt Nora was sitting in a chair. Old Wash was standing up, his gun at his belt, and hat in hand.

"Ellie, you forgot to kiss me yesterday," he laughed. "I reck'n you was sorty plagued, with all them youngsters looking on. Reck'n your stomach would stand the strain this soon after breakfast if you kissed me good-by."

"Good-by! Why, are you going away?"

"I'm goin' to start, and a fellow never knows how far he's goin' when he starts, above the timber line. I may go a good piece."

Ellie put her arms to his neck, and standing on tiptoes, kissed him.

"You shore know how!" he smiled, and a minute later he left the house, with laughter on his lips, after kissing Aunt Nora and patting her shoulder.

There was no smile on the face of Aunt Nora, as she sat staring out the window for a long minute, then heaved a great sigh.

"What's the matter, Aunt Nora? Don't you feel well this morning? I can clear the table and wash the dishes for you."

"Oh, I'm all right, honey. I was just thinking. Come on, you can help me with the breakfast things."

The corral could be seen from a window of the kitchen, and from time to time Ellie glanced out that way. Uncle Wash had said he was going to start somewhere, but he was out there talking to the men. She saw him take Clem and Howdy apart from the others and talk to them a long time. After that they all stood smoking, as if they meant to never do anything else.

Suddenly, there was movement among them, and she was amazed at how quickly they got to their saddles. With Wash Baines leading them, they rode away in a bunch toward the trail that ran from Lone Elm to the twin cottonwood crossing, which was the old cattle trail. Aunt Nora saw them, also.

"Let's go out on the gallery awhile, Ellie," she said, drying her hands.

ON the long front gallery, the two women stopped. The Bar 6 men were riding slowly out into the open prairie toward the trail. Half a mile away, another band of men were

coming toward them, riding at a gallop. Ellie counted them, as they rode in a straggling, open formation. Thirty-eight riders.

"Who are those other men, aunty? Are they the ones that were coming to 'ride' the Bar 6?"

"Looks like it, and there's enough of 'em to do it," and with her lips drawn in a hard, tight line, Mrs. Baines sat down in a chair, because her knees were trembling. Ellie didn't notice that. She was looking at the two groups of men, intent on witnessing the riding if it took place.

Less than a quarter of a mile from the ranch house, Baines and his men stopped in an irregular line. Baines was about midway the line. Ellie could make out Clem on one side of him and Howdy on the other. The oncoming riders checked their speed and came on at a walk, finally stopping fifty feet or more away from the Bar 6 men, and facing them in a longer line.

Ellie could make out a taller man, on a larger horse than the rest, ride slightly forward from the other group, and at the same time Wash Baines rode a few paces forward from his men.

"What are they doing now?" asked Ellie.

"Hush, honey. Uncle Wash is going to try to talk 'em out of making trouble. Listen and see if you can hear 'em."

Nora Baines was gripping the arms of the old rustic rocker, but Ellie didn't notice that, either. Her eyes were fixed on the two groups of men. She strained her ears, but heard nothing, though they were talking.

"Howdy, Berry," greeted Baines. "What's the army for? This ain't no round-up."

"Yes, it is," snapped Berry Young. "It's a round-up for a coupla killers,

and we aim to cut yo' bunch and take 'em."

"Now listen, Berry. This ain't friendly. This land belongs to me, and I stay on it mostly. I've treated everybody right since I come in here. I've went out of my way to treat 'em right."

"We ain't got nothin' ag'in' you."

"Oh, you ain't? Looks to me like you fellows come out here to sorty ride the Bar 6. Now, they ain't no use in that. Anybody can get along with me that halfway tries."

"I tell you we ain't got nothin' ag'in' you. It's Clem and Howdy we want, and we aim to take 'em. They ain't much law in this country, but we aim to make some. We're vigilantes and cold killin' don't go."

"Berry, I wish you fellows would go on back to town. Ain't no use in anybody being hurt in a mess. You can't take ary one of my men, let alone two of 'em."

"Hell we can't! What's goin' to stop us?"

"Listen, Berry," pleaded Wash Baines. "I ain't as blind as I look like I been."

"The Folder boys over on yon side the river and Lake Evers and his friends on this side have been rearin' to ride my outfit. Nacherly, I don't want to be rode. Then the Folderses jumped one of my men, aimin' to kill him, in the hope I'd take it up. They didn't have no luck. Then Lake takes it up and gets hisself killed. If it wasn't me you fellows was after, why didn't you take Clem and Howdy when they were in town last night? Forty or fifty of you shorely could take two men, if you wanted to."

"I didn't come out here to argue. I told you we come after Clem and Howdy, and we're goin' to take 'em."

"And I tell you you can't take 'em, and if you start anything—"

BERRY YOUNG'S gun flashed from the holster. Standing on the old gallery, Ellie saw a white puff of smoke, and saw old Wash Baines lean forward over his saddle horn. In the same instant, she saw many other puffs, and saw Berry Young crash to the ground, just as the sound of roaring guns reached her ears. Aunt Nora sprang to her feet, and gripping a gallery post, stood straining her eyes at the terrible tragedy that was being enacted in plain view of them. Horses were plunging, guns crashing, but from where they stood they could not see the details of the fight.

Berry Young had treacherously sought to murder old Wash Baines and had come perilously near doing it. His bullet had passed through Baines's body just below the heart. He had fired but one shot, because Howdy's bullet had crashed through Young's brain almost at the same second, and every Bar 6 gun was roaring. Wounded as he was, Wash Baines clung to his saddle horn and emptied his gun into the ranks of his enemies.

Abruptly the fake vigilantes broke before the terrible onslaught. The Bar 6 men were no ordinary punchers. Wash Baines had picked them against just such a possibility as this. As Young's men, now without a leader, broke and fled, leaving half a dozen dead, and many wounded, the Bar 6 men followed them, pouring a storm of lead and curses after them. It was at that moment that Wash Baines slid from the saddle. Ellie, who was watching her uncle, screamed:

"Oh, they've killed Uncle Wash! I'm going out there," and she flew toward the gate.

"Come back, Ellie," called Aunt Nora. "That's no place for women. They'll kill you!"

But Ellie didn't seem to hear her. She was out the gate and running like mad toward the battle ground. Mrs. Baines, seeing the girl wouldn't come back, followed her, but Ellie was far in the lead. When Ellie reached the scene, Clem and old John Hoard were stooping over Baines. Clem was examining the wounds, while John kept up a steady patter of cursing Berry Young, which sounded like a monk telling his beads.

"Miss Baines!" cried Clem, looking up. "You mustn't be out here. Those fellows may rally and come back."

"If they do, I'll kill them!" and Ellie grabbed up her uncle's empty gun from the ground.

Baines stirred and opened his eyes.

"Why, Ellie! What are you doin' out here? I'm all right, boys. I just got sorty sick and fell off my horse. Where'd that gang go?"

"Some of 'em didn't go nowhere," replied John Hoard, grimly. "The boys are chasing the rest."

"Steady now, Nora," said Baines, as his wife came up. "You and Ellie oughtn't to took a chance like this. Put me in my saddle, fellows. I can make it to the house. Better get a doctor."

They helped him to his saddle and he clutched the horn. Nora led the horse, while Clem walked on one side and Hoard on the other. Just as they were about to start, they heard a horse lunge behind them. All looked around in time to see Ellie gain the saddle of a horse she had caught.

"Here! Ellie! What are you going to do?" screeched Aunt Nora.

"I'm going after a doctor."

"Good Lord! You'll be killed," cried old Wash.

"No, I won't, Uncle Wash. I've got your gun. I can ride—anything," and she was gone, her hair flying in the wind, and the horse moving as if the devil bestrode him.

Ellie didn't strike the running fight, because the gun-fighters had crossed the trail and headed toward the river, instead of toward the town. Dr. Bowden was standing in the door of his little office when a horse skidded to a stop.

"Are you the doctor?" asked Ellie.

"Yes."

"Then get your horse and let's go. Uncle Wash has been shot and if you don't get there in a minute, he'll die."

"What happened out there?"

"I told you Uncle Wash was shot. That's enough. Come on, or—"

SHE raised the empty gun which was still in her hand. Dr. Bowden darted into his office, grabbed an instrument case, and a moment later mounted his horse, which was standing ready saddled, and rode calmly out of town, too dignified to hurry. They were opposite the old shack where Shorty Glyn had shot at Clem the night before, when Ellie said:

"Can't you ride faster than that?"

"Yes, I—ah—suppose I could."

"Then hold on," and before he could protest, she swung up the heavy quirt that had been largely instrumental in the speed of her coming to town. It came down with a slithering, blistering crash across the rump of the doctor's fine horse, and before it could get lead enough to dodge her, she presented it with another slash.

The horse sped along the trail. The doctor looked back. Ellie was at his quarter.

"Ride, or I'll shoot," she screamed, waving the gun. The doctor didn't

know it was empty, or that Ellie wouldn't have known how to fire if it had been loaded. The doctor rode. Once he let his horse lag. Down came that blistering quirt again, and there was no more lagging. Dr. Bowden's spurs were red when he sprang from his horse at the Bar 6 and ran to the house.

It was two hours later, when Dr. Bowden, having stopped the bleeding, dressed the wound, and put his patient under the influence of a powerful opiate, stepped out onto the long gallery to get a breath of air and take a smoke. He came upon a slip of a girl slumped in an old rustic chair, crying her heart out.

"Come, come, little lady. You'd better let me give you something for those nerves."

"I—I don't want anything for my nerves. I haven't got any. I didn't mean to be rough, but Uncle Wash—"

"Ho, ho! That's what you're crying about. Well, quit it. If I'd been five minutes later, your uncle would have died. As it is, he's got a good fighting chance to pull through. You ought to thank Heaven you did get rough. But where on earth did you learn to ride like that? I understood you came from back East."

"I came from Kentucky. My father was a trainer, and he taught me how to ride."

"I see. And who taught you to shoot?"

"N-nobody. That gun was empty, and I didn't know how to shoot it, anyway."

"That's rich!" chuckled the doctor. "You may be a tenderfoot above the timber line, but you'll get by."

"And people won't think I'm terrible?"

"No, they won't think that," said

the doctor calmly. "Come on, now. You may think you have no nerves, but you are mistaken. Your uncle is asleep and resting easy. I'm going to give you a little powder, and you must lie down and rest awhile."

Ellie took the powder and lay down on her bed. Presently, she quit sobbing and was comfortable. A moment later she was asleep. Dr. Bowden knew hysteria when he saw it, and that alone, in his mind, would account for the things Ellie had done.

So it chanced that Ellie knew nothing of wagons coming from town and taking away the bodies of Berry Young and seven of his men, and two Bar 6 riders, who would never ride again. She didn't know the doctor had gone to the bunk shack and dressed the serious wounds of three Bar 6 riders and minor wounds of half a dozen more. In fact, she didn't know anything. When Doc Bowden put 'em to sleep, they stayed asleep. Ellie woke up in time for breakfast next morning!

When she got out to the kitchen, Aunt Nora had her hands in the dough again, but she didn't ask to have her nose scratched. She rubbed the dough off her hands, dabbed them in flour, and took Ellie in her arms.

"You're the blessedest child on earth!" she said, with a choke in her voice, and tears in her eyes. "If it hadn't been for you, Wash would have died. I knowed Tom Baines was a horse trainer, but I didn't think about you knowin' how to ride. When I seen you climb that wild braunk, I thought shore it would kill you."

"I—I didn't mean to be rough, Aunt Nora. I was just thinking about Uncle Wash."

"Rough!" cried Aunt Nora, patting flour on Ellie's back. "Bless yo' sweet soul, you wouldn't know how to be

rough. Bad off as Wash is, I laughed till I cried when Doc Bowden told me, after you went to sleep, how you brang him on the jump and skeered him almost into fits with that empty gun."

"Won't—won't everybody think I'm terrible, Aunt Nora?"

"Yes. Terrible smart and good and sweet. Set the table now while I finish these biscuits. I'm so happy, I reck'n I'll cry into 'em. Doc Bowden says yo' Uncle Wash will get well if he's nursed proper. I told him you and me was nursin' pore fools."

EVERYTHING was far from all right with the Bar 6. Clem Saddle knew that, as he squatted at the corral gate, talking things over with Howdy and John Hoard. Two men were dead and three out of the game with serious wounds. That left only fifteen, including the slightly wounded.

The Lake Evers gang had been badly crimped, but that had been just the first real skirmish of the war. The gang on the Texas side had to be broken up now, while they were on the run. Otherwise, they'd reorganize and make more trouble. Then, when that gang was run out, the Folder boys, across in the Indian country, would have to be reckoned with. As soon as they learned that Wash Baines was down and out, they'd go on the prod for fair.

"Well, Clem," said Old John Hoard, "you're boss now. As soon as Old Man Wash is able to talk, you better find out what he wants did. I wish him and them women was away from here. This old Bar 6 ain't going to be no very healthy locality for a while."

"You're older than I, John. You're the one that ought to be boss."

"Nope. Wash Baines has got more confidence in you than he has in any other human on earth. You lead. I'll foller you plumb to the middle of hell to get the fellers that's tryin' to ride the Bar 6."

They were still sitting there when Ellie finished breakfast and looked out the window.

"Wash is lots pearter this mornin'," said Aunt Nora, coming into the kitchen with a tray. "He et his broth and drank a big cup of coffee, then called for a smoke. He wants you to go call Clem and tell him to come to the house."

That errand was harder than ever for Ellie, but she went bravely about it. When she got to the corral and gave Clem the message, he sprang up and accompanied her to the house, but neither of them spoke on the way. As Clem entered the sick room, Ellie turned away from the door.

"You come in, too, Ellie," called Old Wash, weakly. "Come around here and sit on the bed. Let me hold yo' hand. It helps the pain a lot. Now, here's what I want to tell you," as Clem stood on the opposite side of the bed from Ellie. "I got an idea this mess has just started good, and I'm down and out. I want you to take charge, Clem. They've crippled us some, but they ain't kilt us—yet. I ain't tellin' you what to do, but you can't take chances with the little gang that's left. Every man that's in that Berry Young gang yesterday ought to be killed, but you boys will have to sorty hunt easy and get 'em like you would coyotes."

BAINES went on talking, until Nora came in and said:

"Now, Wash. You ain't got no business talkin' so much and worryin' over things."

"All right, Nora. You're the doctor. They's just one more little thing. Clem, you and Ellie ain't seemed to me right friendly. I want you to be. Shake hands acrost me now, and I'll be quiet."

They reached out and clasped hands, looked into each other's eyes, and dropped their heads. A moment later Clem was gone. Old Wash took his "drops." In a moment he was dozing, and the two women tiptoed from the room.

"Nobody ever would think Wash Baines was the soft-hearted man he is, just to hear him talk," said Mrs. Baines. "It just breaks his heart to think anybody he loves don't like his friends. He sets more store by Clem than he do by anybody else on earth, unless it would be me or you. He thinks you don't like Clem."

"It's—it's just because I didn't understand," said Ellie. "I know the difference now between a cold killer and another kind of killer. I know what it means to be rode, too. I don't blame a man for killing somebody that's trying to kill him, but—what did Uncle Wash mean by trimming those fellows to our size?"

"Well, it looks like they trimmed about eight yesterday. He meant, fight 'em in little bunches and not take chances."

"Oh, that would be terrible."

"Why, honey, every one of them men would kill any of our boys if they could. There won't be any giving up now. One side of the quarrel has just got to either kill the other out, or run 'em out of the country."

"I know, but it's terrible."

"What's terrible about it?"

"Why, they might get some of our men!"

"Oh, that's different, ain't it? You'll learn about the country above the tim-

ber line yet. They all but got my man yesterday. He'll go yet, if I don't watch him clost, and nurse him good. That's my main job now."

"Aunt Nora, please don't think—"

"Honey, I don't think anything wrong about you. I know some things. One of them is that you're the biggest woman yo' size that ever watched for her man to come back from a gun mess or round-up, and you'll be doin' that before you been above the timber line long."

CHAPTER V.

THE TRIMMING PROCESS.

THAT same evening, at nightfall, Clem asked old John Hoard if he wanted to take a little ride with him and Howdy.

"You don't have to ask me. Tell me when you want me. They ain't no place you'll go that I won't go."

"All right. We're going to town to-night. As soon as it gets good and dark."

Riding silently toward the old cowtown, scene of three skirmishes of this war, and battles in hundreds of others, Clem pondered his situation. He knew he was young to have such responsibility thrown on his shoulders, yet he was determined to win or die in the attempt. The chances, he knew, were good that he would do just that. There were only fifteen left of the Bar 6 outfit, and some of them badly crippled.

There was a chance that they could whip the gang on the Texas side, if they struck again at once; but the real killers and the big army of thieves were on the other side of the river. Never had men to fight greater odds, opposing men who were bold, hard fighters and expert gunmen.

His mind rambled from one phase of the situation to another, bringing up at last with Ellie Baines and the wonderful ride she had made to save her uncle's life. Why had Wash Baines said what he did about him and Ellie not being friendly? He had not said a word against Ellie to any living soul. What had she said to Baines to make him think they were not friendly?

Funny that a woman could think a man was a cold killer, because he killed another in a fight. Funny she didn't think old Wash Baines was a cold killer. Wash had killed three of Berry Young's men after he was shot half in two. Maybe she didn't know that. Anyway, why did Wash Baines want him and Ellie to be friendly?

He was still pondering this, when they rode into town, left their horses at the same old stable where he and Howdy had left theirs the night before, and stole forward in the darkness. Clem wanted to see Ed Royles, proprietor of the Silver Spur, the first thing. There was something he wanted Royles to do.

It was not yet nine o'clock when Royles put on his coat, crossed the street, and stopped and peered into the little alley where he had seen Clem and Howdy that night.

"Waiting for you, Ed," said Clem. "Come in." They walked to the back of the passage. "Now, Ed, I want you to do something for me that I can't do for myself."

"What is it?"

"This quarrel has turned into a war. I've got to have guns and ammunition. Six-shooters are all right in close quarters, but we can't afford to get that close. Only fifteen Bar 6 men left and part of them crippled."

"Well, what can I do about it?"

"Go down to the hardware store and

get me fifteen Winchester carbines, forty-four caliber, same as our six-shooters, and all the cartridges they've got.

"Hmmm! All right. I guess Lacey Gibbs will keep quiet about it. I'm on his notes for about all he's worth. Where do you want 'em?"

"Have them put up in three bundles and leave them on the ground just around the corner livery stable corral. Now tell me what you know. Anything that'll help."

"I DON'T know a whole lot," Royles said thoughtfully. "One thing you ought to know, though. All that gang that come out to the Bar 6 yesterday ain't crooked. Berry Young let out a big howl that Lake Evers and Wade Scanlon, the one you and Howdy got in the street fight, was killed cold. He got the people riled and a dozen of them fellows that went along thought they were doing their duty as good citizens. When they saw Berry treacherously shoot Baines, when they were supposed to be parleying, the decent ones pulled out of it. I'm going to name 'em to you, so you won't hold it ag'in' 'em," and Royles named them.

"That's all right, Ed. I never heard of any of those fellows doing anything wrong. Who's in town tonight?"

"I was going to tell you that. You boys have put an awful crimp in the gang on this side, but there's some left and they're plannin' right now to organize and try it again."

"Who are they?"

"Shorty Glyn is the main pin right now. Him and six more come in here a little while ago."

"Where are they?"

"Aw, hell, Clem. I'm into this thing now. They're bound to find out sooner or later that I'm packin' news to you.

They're right over there in the Silver Spur, takin' some drinks, playin' some poker, and tellin' what they aim to do to you the first time they ketch you out."

"I promised you I wouldn't start another mess in the Silver Spur."

"I know you did, but I didn't ask you to promise that. I just asked you not to start another one until I got that one cleaned up. It's cleaned up now. If you fellows don't run that gang out of the country, they'll take me apart as soon as they know where I stand. Just wait until I get them guns and cartridges safe, then go as far as you like."

"Fine! We'll wait right here until you get the guns and go home."

Hoard and Howdy waited at the back of the passage. Clem went to the front and watched Royles as he crossed to the hardware store. There was a dim light in the store window, indicating that Lacey Gibbs was in there and probably trying to figure out whether it would pay him to go broke. It was only a few minutes until Royles came out with his arms full of bundles and went on toward the livery stable. Clem waited until he heard Royles cross the street on his way home, then went back to Hoard and Howdy.

"All right, boys," he whispered. "The performance in the big ring is about to begin. Let's go and get a front seat."

WALKING directly across the street, the three entered the Silver Spur together. Shorty Glyn and his six companions were lined up at the bar, talking and laughing. They had perfected their plans for organizing the scattered remnants of the Lake Evers gang, and had made Shorty their leader.

At the bar Shorty was putting down a list of names as the bartender called them—men who were likely to join. Shorty was the first to see, in the mirror over the bar, the three Bar 6 men, as they walked quietly in. The bartender and Sam, the porter, saw them about the same time, and ducked below the bullet-proof bar.

Shorty couldn't duck behind anything. He had no taste for a gun fight with three of the swiftest gunmen in the country, but there was no way out of it. He knew what would happen if he reached for his gun. The other six now saw the intruders, and whirled, drawing their guns.

No participator in what followed could have described it. Guns crashed, the room was filled with smoke, and the big swinging lamp was put out by the concussion. The place was in darkness, and what had happened no one knew. In the darkness, some one sprang out the door. Clem saw the man dimly, but held his fire. It might be the bartender or the frightened porter. He wished afterward he had shot at the flying man. Instead, he ran to the door and reached it just as a horse clattered away down the street, going north. Turning back into the room, he called John and Howdy. They both answered and said they were unhurt.

"Light a candle, Willetts, and put it on the bar," Clem called to the bartender. "We'll see that you're not hurt."

A match flared behind the bar, and a candle was lit. It was shaking until the shadows danced.

"Come on," called Clem. "Put it on the bar. They're all down."

Willetts rose and stuck the candle on the front edge of the bar. On the floor in front of the bar was a sham-

bles. They looked the dead outlaws over. Only six of the seven were there. Shorty Glyn, the leader, was gone and he had headed north toward the river.

"I'm sorry, Willetts," said Clem, "but we haven't got time to help clean this mess up."

Ed Royles stepped into the saloon, and Clem stepped to his side and whispered:

"Willetts stands in with that gang, and I'm going to give you hell for his benefit," then he raised his voice. "Royles, you can't run a blind calf over me any longer. This joint stands in with rustlers and crooks. There's some of your friends on the floor, and there'll be more if—"

Royles denied the charge hotly, and Clem went on roasting him. He informed him that the gang on the Texas side had been congregating at the Silver Spur, and getting information. That they had jumped the Bar 6, and now the Bar 6 was going to take them to a cleaning. That the next time he caught a gang of killers congregated there, he would take the place apart properly.

Willetts stood white-faced behind the bar. Presently, he stammered: "Mr. Royles, will you wait on the gentlemen a minute? I got to go out. Be right back."

Willetts caught up his hat and coat, and darted out the door. Royles went to the door and watched him, as he ran toward the livery stable.

"It 'll be a good long minute before he gets back. You've run my night man off."

"I'm sorry. I wish he was right here with these others. He was helping Shorty make a list of men who would join his gang, when we came in."

"The hell he was! Why didn't you kill him?"

"He wouldn't show fight, and it would have been about like killing a woman."

"I reck'n so. He's gone, anyway. Where's the nigger?"

"Behind the bar, I guess."

"Sam!" roared Royles. "Where are you?"

"Oooh, Lawdy! Here I is, Mist' Ed, but—"

"Come out of there. Nobody's goin' to hurt you."

Sam scrambled out from behind the bar, covered with dirt from the floor, and his eyes wide with terror.

"Go over to Sul Redmon's shop and tell him to come get these fellows."

GLAD of the chance to escape, Sam darted out the door to go to the one place that he feared more than anything except bullets—the place where coffins were kept. Undertaker Redmon slept in a little room at the back of his shop, and the chattering of Sam's teeth was enough to wake him, without his pounding on the door.

When Sam was gone, Ed Royles said:

"Well, Clem, you Bar 6 fellows have ruined the gang on this side of the river. Shorty was the last one left that could lead 'em, and he's gone from here. Outfit you got to watch now is the Folder boys and their gang. Shorty will go straight for 'em. Pity you didn't get him. He won't fight, ain't got no nerve, but he's the best schemer they got, knows the country, and everybody in it. He'll join up with the Folder gang now."

"He hasn't joined up with 'em yet," snapped Clem. "Hate to leave you with this mess, Ed, but we got to ride."

"Go ahead. I'll get it cleaned up. Try to pick Shorty up before he gets to the river."

There was no use finishing. The three Bar 6 men were gone. As they neared the stable, a man mounted and dashed away north.

"Don't shoot," cautioned Clem. "That's Willetts. He had his horse in Pop's corral. He's gone to catch up with Shorty."

They found the guns, and each taking a bundle, they hurried on to where they had left their horses.

"John, can you worry along with all these bundles?" asked Clem.

"Yes, I can pack 'em."

"All right. Get them home. I'll take Howdy and see if we can overhaul those two fellows before they reach the twin cottonwood crossing."

On north, over the same trail that had been the scene of Ellie's race with death, they galloped on. The difference was that they were carrying death with them if they overhauled their quarry. Obviously, Shorty and Willetts expected to be chased. Willetts punished his horse terribly in his fright and overtook Shorty just where the trail turned off to the Bar 6. They stopped a moment for breath.

"We better not stop here," said Willetts. "We ain't got no business this side of the river. The gang's bust."

"Oh, shut up!" growled Shorty. "Listen!"

Drumming of hoofs behind them on the hard trail could be plainly heard, not more than three hundred yards away. It was just a mile to the crossing at the twin cottonwoods. In that mile Clem and Howdy shortened the lead the others had to little more than a hundred yards by the time the fugitives splashed into the ford. Shorty and Willetts were almost to the bar on the other side, when Clem and Howdy pulled up at the water's edge and opened fire.

The range was too long for six-shooters, and the fleeing outlaws were making it longer with all possible speed that was left in their mounts. Clem wished he had one of the rifles, but if he had waited to get it, he never would have caught his men. All he had done was to make sure that Shorty and Willetts had gone to join the Folders. This was definite proof that the gang on the Texas side was broken and scattered.

SHORTY and Willetts disappeared into a chain of sand dunes and willows on the other side of the river. The formation was eccentric at that point. A high ridge ran from the headland near the Bar 6 down to the river. The bank on the Texas side was high. A lone cottonwood of immense size stood on the bank, and the river channel at that time, ran in to the Texas bank. The ridge seemed to extend on across the river, and to have been cut through by the stream.

The bottom of the river at that point had only a little quicksand, and below it a stratum of packsand, or soft sand-rock, which made it the safest ford in many miles. The trail entered the river a hundred feet below the big cottonwood.

In the dim light of the sky Clem could see the cottonwood's twin. It stood on the other side of the river, two hundred feet back from the water's edge, where the channel had probably been from time to time, but now high in the sand dunes. Against the skylight, he could see the wire cable, stretched from one of the trees to the other.

Lying against the bank and snubbed to a cottonwood on the Texas side was a small ferryboat. It belonged to the Bar 6. Only a few weeks before, Wash Baines had had it repaired, new ropes

put to the cable pulleys, and everything made shipshape. Not that he needed it, but sometimes when the river was up, it was an accommodation to travelers to be able to get across.

When there was high water, people came by the Bar 6 on the Texas side, and asked to be set across. On the other side, three quick shots would bring some one from the Bar 6 to operate the boat. Big-hearted old Wash Baines owned the boat, and the franchise which went with his land. He felt under obligation to keep the ferry in safe working order—not for any money it might bring him, but because he was a good man and wanted to do what was right.

Looking down at the boat, now in shallow water, Clem thought of these things. To him, Wash Baines was the embodiment and personification of all that was good in man. The saving salt that had kept Clem from being a wild, irresponsible drifter, no better than Shorty Glyn, perhaps, was the effort to be like Wash Baines, to be what Baines wanted and expected him to be. He didn't think he had succeeded, but he would never cease to try.

Clem had killed again, but it wasn't of his choosing. It had to be done, and more of it would have to be done. It was in defense, not of himself, but of Wash Baines and his interest. Wash Baines, who had been the only real father he ever knew, and Aunt Nora, who had been a mother to him.

The bigger a man is, the nearer he can be to a little boy in moments of great stress. For all the wildness of his early youth, and in spite of faults to which all humanity is heir, Clem Saddler was a big man. He had the blood and stamina, and when the real pinch came, it would tell. Now, sitting his horse in silence, looking down at

another sky and other stars in the water, Clem was as a little boy who has lost his way.

HOW could he ever protect the Bar 6, Uncle Wash, and Aunt Nora?

That little band of thieves and killers had been broken up, but that was nothing. Only a link in the chain. Across the river were the Folders and half a dozen other gangs, who would club together to prevent the blocking of this thieves' highway by honest old Wash Baines.

Far out on the Texas prairies were cowmen, supposedly respectable, who wanted the way left open by the old trail and the twin cottonwood crossing. These would send other men to take the places of such men as Lake Evers, Berry Young, and others who had been killed since the war began. Who was going to take the place of the dead Bar 6 punchers? Who was going to take the place of the three who lay wounded near to death in the bunk house? And who was going to take the place of Wash Baines, if he went? That, Clem knew, was more than likely, for the doctor had told him more than he told Aunt Nora. Just a little sloughing of an artery near which the bullet had passed, and all would be over.

"Don't tell the women this," Doc Bowden had said. "It couldn't do any good and might do harm. Mr. Baines has a powerful physique, and he may pull through this, but the less he's fussed over and excited, the better."

Who was going to take Uncle Wash's place, if that little sloughing happened? Clem knew that a little farther down on the Texas side of the river, below the timber line, the citizens had organized and cleaned the country up. But here, above the timber line, was the edge of the world.

That narrow strip of tawny water separated the United States from another nation. A nation within a nation, it is true, but none the less a nation. Across there in the Indian country were millions of acres of rolling prairie that the civilized tribes didn't occupy because they were afraid of the Comanches and Arapahoes and the fierce Cheyennes, whose reservation lay just west of them.

This great rangeland was held by such lawless squatters as the Folders, who lived in dugouts, stole without stint, and killed without scruple. Who would take Wash Baines's place in a war with such as these? Clem stiffened his legs until the saddle squeaked, and forgetting he was alone, said aloud:-

"I'll do it, or die trying!"

"What say, Clem?" drawled Howdy sleepily.

"Nothing. Let's ride from here."

THEY met old John Hoard where the trail turned off to the Bar 6.

He was jogging along, with more than a hundred pounds of guns and ammunition on his horse.

"Give me part of that stuff, John," and Clem took one of the three bundles, while Howdy took another.

"Get anything?" asked John.

"Not a thing. They beat us to the river, and we thought we better not go across."

"That's right. We ain't got no business on that side. The Federal government is supposed to keep things straight over there, but it plays hell doin' it."

They rode on to the ranch in silence, unsaddled, and took their bundles into the bunk house. The men were asleep and they didn't rouse them. Howdy and John slipped off their boots and went to bed. Clem went out and rolled

a smoke. Up at the house there was a light in the kitchen window. He wondered how Wash Baines was resting. Had that artery began to slough? He had to know. He wouldn't make any noise. He threw away his cigarette, went to the house, and tapped softly on the kitchen door. It opened softly and Ellie stood before him, her fingers on her lips. She stepped out and closed the door quietly behind her, but he had seen her tear-wet cheeks.

"Don't make any noise," she whispered. "About dark he sent for you, and the men said you were gone. He got restless then and has been worrying ever since. Aunt Nora gave him some more drops and he's resting now."

"Go in and see if he's asleep. If he's not, tell him we're all back, safe and sound. Maybe that'll help him to go to sleep."

Ellie opened the door and stole softly back into the house, leaving it open. He heard her tell Wash Baines that the boys had all come in safe and sound, and heard him say:

"All right, honey. I think I'll go to sleep now."

When Ellie came back, she closed the door again and repeated what Baines had said.

"I heard him, Miss Baines. Is there anything on earth that I can do?"

"Not a thing, Clem. Aunt Nora and I won't sleep until he gets quiet, and then one of us will watch, while the other sleeps. I'm so glad I'm here to help."

"God bless you for that, Miss Baines."

"Please don't call me that. Call me Ellie. Uncle Wash wants us to be friendly, and on his account, even if you do despise me for what I said. I know what you must think, after what I said."

5 A

"What I think! Maybe I can tell you sometime what I think, but not now. Good night, Ellie."

"Good night, Clem. I'll call you if we need you," and she watched him until he disappeared in the shadows.

Back in the kitchen she wondered. Why was it a pleasure to do the things Clem Saddler asked her to do? Why did she feel so much safer and more comfortable when he was at the ranch? Why did Uncle Wash and Aunt Nora think so much of him? Aunt Nora had said:

"It would be a big comfort to have Clem about the house, but the poor boy has to ride and fight all day, and he needs sleep."

He might be a killer, but this wasn't killing, as she had always understood it. Uncle Wash wouldn't love a cold killer, the way he loved Clem. With a sigh, she stole back into the sick room, where Aunt Nora sat watching the steady respiration of Wash Baines, as he slept peacefully.

CHAPTER VI.

SPIES.

CAME morning and the guns were issued to the men who could still ride. Old John Hoard, who was a master rifleman, took charge of the arming. He showed the boys how to wrap the jointed cleaning rod with a rag, to keep it from rattling in the chamber in the stock, when the horse trotted. He showed them how to adjust the sights for a hundred yards on to three hundred. The men saddled up, each with a carbine in his saddle scabbard.

"Keep yo' belts full of cartridges," admonished old John, "but remember when you're in a hurry, you can get

cartridges outn yo' pocket quicker'n you can get 'em from a belt."

Everybody was ready to ride, but Clem had given no orders.

"Just keep your mounts saddled, boys, and stick around," he said. "I don't know yet what we'll do to-day. The cattle ought to be worked back from the river. This is a fine time for a lot of 'em to be run across and given the double-O, but we can't ride after cattle. I'll go up and see if Uncle Wash has any orders to give."

Clem walked off toward the house. As he approached the gate, he saw Ellie looking out the kitchen window. When he knocked, the door opened and Aunt Nora was standing there, wiping her hands on her apron. She stepped out, closed the door, and walked away from the house before she spoke. Clem noticed that her eyes were sunken and had dark circles under them.

"Wash is mighty bad, Clem," she said, when they were well out of hearing of the house. "Ellie's with him now, and he's still asleep. I been wondering if I didn't give him too much of them drops. I don't know what I'd ever 'a' done if Ellie hadn't been here. She saved Wash's life by getting a doctor, and she's been right by him most of the time since."

"Do you think he's worse?"

"I can't tell, Clem. Doc Bowden has been here every day, but he don't tell anything. Just says we must keep him quiet and not let him get excited. This is the third day, and the doctor said he'd be out early to-day."

"Is there anything I can do, Aunt Nora?"

"Not a thing, son. Ellie and me can manage here at the house. You got yo' hands full outside. Tell the boys not to make no more noise than they can help. Seems like any little

noise excites him. When he's awake, he has Ellie look out the window forty times a day to see if anybody's coming. I thought maybe them drops affected his mind, and he was sorty halfway dreamin' about Berry Young's gang and expectin' them to come back."

"It might be that. Call me if you want me."

"I'll let you know what doc says soon as I can."

Clem turned toward the side gate, and Aunt Nora went back into the house. As Clem passed out of the gate and turned to hook the worn chain on its nail, he glimpsed Ellie, looking out the window again. He was hurt and disappointed. She had said the night before that she wanted to be friendly with him, on account of Uncle Wash. Why wouldn't she even come to the door and say good morning.

CLEM had just got back to the corral and was watching the road for Dr. Bowden, when a new, glossy ranch buggy, drawn by a fine team, swept around the foot of the headland and on toward the Bar 6. Clem wondered who it could be. Certainly Doc Bowden wasn't sporting a rig like that.

There were two men in the buggy, and it drew up a little way from the corral. One of the men was a tall, raw-boned fellow of forty, with a bony face and predatory nose. The other was a thick-necked, red-faced chap, with little pig-eyes.

"Mr. Baines about?" asked Pig-eyes, as Clem walked toward the buggy, with John and Howdy a little way behind him.

"Mr. Baines is in bed, very ill," replied Clem.

"Ain't able to be seen?"

"No, sir."

"You the foreman?"

"Yes, sir."

"I heard Baines got shot some in a little mess the other day. Hurt dangerous bad?"

"Seriously wounded."

"How many men you got?"

"There are twenty hands."

"I see. I understood some men were killed and two, three pretty badly shot up."

"Yes." Clem was getting about enough of Pig-eyes's questions.

"Holt's my name."

"Saddler's mine."

"This is my partner, Mr. Raiford, Mr. Saddler."

Clem acknowledged the introduction, but didn't offer to go nearer the buggy and shake hands with either man.

"You probably heard of us," continued the pig-eyed Holt, nodding his head toward the predatory Raiford. "Holt & Raiford, cattle dealers. We got a contract to furnish some beef to the government at Fort Sill and Anadarko. We're driving through to pick a route. Understand the twin cottonwoods on the old trail is the best crossing on the upper river."

"Yes, sir."

"Baines ain't got no objection to a little trail herd crossin' his range, I reck'n?"

"No, sir. Everybody uses the trail that wants to. Let us know when your herd is coming through, and we'll push our cattle back out of the way and help you cross."

"Thank you, but we wouldn't want to trouble you. Ain't a very big herd. Just four, five hundred."

"No trouble at all. We'd be there, anyway. Mr. Baines always cuts a herd when it crosses his range."

"Cuts it! What for?" and a swift glance passed between Holt and his, literally, silent partner.

"For his own cattle and his neighbors' stuff."

"Who are his neighbors?"

"Every ranchman whose brand he knows, and he knows most of 'em, from here to the Brazos."

"Do you know 'em, too?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, we'll be driving on. Want to take a look at that crossing. Aim to drive on through to Sill. Want to see how the grass is in the reservations, and what the chances is for some slow driving and fattening on the way. May not bring our herd this way. Let you know if we do," and turning his team with a flourish, Holt drove away to the old trail and on toward the river. Clem stood watching them, as Holt applied the whip and shot away toward the river.

"EMORY HOLT," growled old John Hoard.

"Do you know him, John?" asked Clem.

"Shore I know him."

"What do you know about him?"

"I know he's a damn cow-thief that poses as a cattle trader. I know he ain't goin' to Fort Sill, or he wouldn't be driving like that this early in the day."

"Where do you think he's going?"

"My guess would be that he's goin' to tell the Folder boys and their crowd that old man Wash is down and out, and they ain't only but fifteen men left in the Bar 6 outfit."

"If I knew that—"

"Well, you don't know that. That's just my guess, so there's nothing can be did about it."

"No, I guess not. Just keep your horses saddled, boys, and fix anything about your rigs that need fixing. We'll have plenty of hard riding to do before

this mess is over," and Clem went on watching for the doctor and looking toward the house from time to time.

Once he saw Ellie come to the kitchen door and throw out a pan of water. He would have liked to go to the house and talk to her, but he had no excuse. He had been there once that morning, and, anyway, she had said they ought to be friendly, on Uncle Wash's account. There was nothing personal about it. She was the gamest woman he had ever seen. The sort of woman for whom a man who knew her would want to go a long way. Little slip of a thing, but she showed real mettle when she climbed that wild bronc and brought the doctor. She'd be pretty, too, if she weren't half dead for sleep, with her eyes red from crying. Clem started from his reverie when old John growled:

"Yonder comes Doc Bowden. It's took him a gosh-awful time to get here."

Dr. Bowden rode up to the gate, dismounted, and went in. Almost an hour later, he came out, walked toward the corral, and motioned to Clem. They met, out of earshot of the other men and of the house.

"How is he, doctor?"

"Pretty bad, Clem. This is the third day, and it's likely to tell the tale. I'm going to stay here all day. I'll put my horse up, so he won't see it at the gate, but I aim to be in call if there's a change for the worse. Baines is a wonderfully fine man, and I'm going to save his life if I can."

"Thank you, doctor. I was going to ask you to stay. Is there anything I can do?"

"Yes. I was coming to that. Mrs. Baines tells me he worries terribly when you're gone from the ranch. Don't leave. Then when he asks about

you, they can tell him truthfully that you're here and all right. He's got all the load he can carry without worrying. There'll be time enough for the rough stuff when he's better—if he gets better. Ed Royles told me what happened last night at the Silver Spur. That breaks up the gang, and you can lay off for a while."

"I won't leave, doctor, until you say go, and I'll keep the other boys here."

"Fine! By the way, that little girl is one corking good nurse. I believe if anybody did anything to hurt Wash Baines's chance to get well, she'd take 'em apart and oil 'em. If I was a young fellow like you— Well, I'll go get my horse and you can show me where to put it."

NOON came and passed. Dr. Bowden ate with the men at the cook-shack, then went back to the house in a serious, thoughtful mood. It was mid-afternoon when he came out, and called Clem aside.

"Clem, it don't look good. Wash is just lying in a stupor. Cool for a while, then sweat pouring off him. That poor little girl is so tired she can hardly stand on her feet, but she won't quit. I'll bet she's wiped a gallon of sweat off Baines since noon. I tell you, Clem, it's God makes women like her. If I was a youngster, I'd ride halfway to hell for a girl like that, and walk the rest of the way."

Clem made no comment, and presently the doctor went on:

"It's just a toss-up now. I've done all I can do. Nature will have to do the rest. If he's got enough vitality, he'll win; if he hasn't— One thing is certain. There must be no excitement. I've doped him all I dared. Tell the boys to keep quiet," and Bowden turned back to the house.

Clem went back to the men, and told them what the doctor said. They were standing in a knot, speaking in low tones, for Wash Baines's men loved him.

"Clem!" cried Old John in a terrible voice. "Look yonder!" He pointed out to the old trail.

At least thirty riders, coming from the river, turned out of the trail and rode for the Bar 6.

"Get your rifles, boys, and get into the corral," ordered Old John.

"This'll finish Uncle Wash!" said Clem, with a choke in his voice.

"It's apt to finish the whole outfit, if we don't work fast," growled John, as they all ran into the corral.

"Somebody ought to be at the house," said Clem.

"No! It ain't a hundred yards from here to the yard fence, no place. We can burn 'em up if they try to go to the house. Scatter along this east fence, boys. Get down on the ground and poke your gun through a crack. Shoot for meat. Damn Emory Holt to the middle section of hell!"

Clem, Howdy, and John were in the corner of the corral, where they could command the front of the house. A stillness came. The rumble of hoofs could be heard only faintly, as the riders came on. It was during that

stillness that Doctor Bowden looked out the window, saw the situation, and took the plunge.

Wash Baines couldn't stand the shock of a gunfight. There was no time for an opiate to act. Grabbing a little vial from his case, he sprinkled something on his handkerchief, and pushing Ellie aside, held it close to the patient's face. He knew he was gambling with death, but if Wash Baines wasn't absolutely unconscious when that gunfight began, death was certain. Holding one limp hand, with his finger on the pulse, he fed the ether to Uncle Wash.

"Clem," muttered Baines, "I think you—better stay here for a—while. Want you—Ellie—be friends—" and then he was gone into the land of strange dreams.

"Is he wandering in his mind, doctor?" asked Aunt Nora.

"No. He'll be all right now. Get that bottle, Miss Ellie, please, and pour a few drops of it on this handkerchief. That's it. Keep your head back from it, and cork it up quick!"

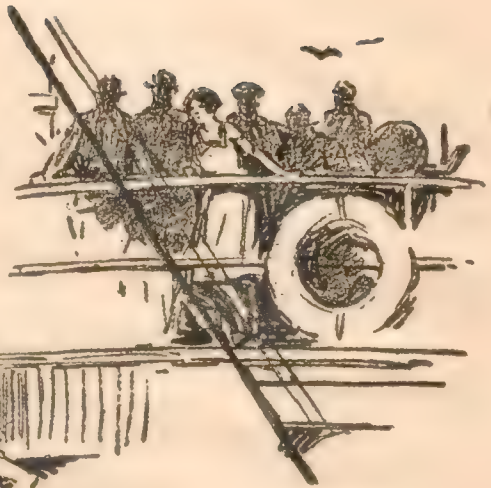
Ellie replaced the cork and set the bottle on the table. She and Aunt Nora had been so intent on the doctor's sudden activity that they had not noticed what was happening outside. The riders came on, spread out in a line.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.



The Punch Puller

Aboard a tropics-bound transport, Jimmy Deane battles his weakness and another's strength for the Army's honor—and his own



He saw pity in her eyes—and a tinge of contempt

By LIEUT. JOHN HOPPER

A WHITE ship, a lonely ghost upon the vast, dark Atlantic, pulsed through the warm, soft night. The Southern Cross, with its right arm faintly visible, winking unsteadily, was both a guide and a sign of welcome to the tropic lands toward which the vessel was voyaging.

The Ulysses was an Army transport. Its mission, carrying replacements, of both officers and men, to the far-flung outposts of the United States Army. In the saloon of the promenade deck, officers and ladies monotonously played at bridge, read, or gathered in groups and gossiped in a cosmopolitan manner of the various stations the world over at which they had served. Everybody perspired—and recalled with

amused wonder the chill rains of New York just a few days behind.

Back aft, in the second-class cabin, were the noncommissioned officers and their families. Some of the men were grizzled sergeants, glad that they were embarking upon their last tour of foreign service. Some were young corporals, with fresh, eager, young wives, looking forward with light hearts and high hopes to their first stations in strange, hot, mysterious lands, whose only familiar sight was the Stars and Stripes that flew over them. Ahead lay promotion, service, service that would make them leather-skinned and wise—and ahead, for some, lay broken hearts.

All through the rest of the ship were the men. The men, the rank and file; the backbone of the Army. Hundreds of them, crowded and jammed into every conceivable space. There were raw recruits for Panama, for Hawaii, for the Philippines, for China—awed, homesick, seasick, suffering. Among them disdainfully walked previous service men, returning to their old love, foreign service, from an unsuccessful whirl at civil life.

Then there were Marines, well trained, well built, superior in manner, bound for Nicaragua to have a try at the bandit Sandino.

All in all, a cargo of democracy. From the promenade deck down to the third deck in the hold, from the perfume of the saloon to the stench of the hold, were faces among which the features of any conceivable nationality could be discerned. All united under the flag of the republic, all bound for the same purpose—to protect those possessions upon which the sun never sets.

On such a night, little does the rest of the republic, preparing to sit down to dinner in safe, clean dining rooms, think of a white ship upon a wide, warm, phosphorescent ocean.

SIX thirty in the evening. For the men, supper had long been over; the "tin" mess kits had been washed of the remnants of "slum." A group of three soldiers squatted on their haunches on the forward well deck of the transport, and took in the beauties of the night with jaundiced eyes.

"Damn these Marines!" The curse came out in the form of a weary sigh; the words of it were toneless, as if they had become so habitual that the originator said them in his sleep. In the shadows of the deck, the speaker's form was puny beside those of his comrades. His voice now became stronger, complaining irritably.

"They thinks they own the world, they do! Jus' 'cause they're goin' to Nicarawga. They thinks they're goin' to a war, they do! Why, those dumb guys don't even know they can't be a war 'less the Army's in on it."

The little fellow, sensing a sympathetic audience, waxed enthusiastic over his wrongs, and the wrongs of

the whole United States Army, at the hands of the United States Marine Corps.

"I can't go no place," he continued, "'thout some sonagun, lop-eared, big Marine says 'Out o' the way, runt!' or 'Here, Bill, lookit what the Army's takin' in these days! Little boy, did you bring along oo 'ittle nursie?' Phaugh!" the speaker spat viciously into the darkness. "It wouldn't be so bad if it weren't for that ham corporal they call Bill. The rest of 'em wouldn't be half bad but for him. He eggs 'em on. He thinks a soldier ain't nothin' but somethin' to wipe his dirty feet on."

The two listeners silently agreed. Bill, the giant Marine, was making life miserable for the hapless Army recruits. Secure in his many years of service, he sneered at the sheeplike soldiers, most of whom were raw recruits, unfamiliar with service ways, and scared at every move they made.

First, he had made friends with them, dined with them, and taken away the few dollars of their pay. With their money all gone, they had depended upon Bill's good fellowship for the loan of a cigarette or two. But Bill had no use for penniless recruits. And in the whole Army contingent, there was not one to teach him a lesson in sportsmanship, or kindness of heart.

Some had tried to do so. Every evening a chance was afforded to those who desired it. For, to while away the tedium of the voyage, a boxing ring was set up, each night, on the after well deck of the ship. In this ring; under the glare of spotlights, which picked the scene out from the hot, dark night, pairs of men battled savagely for the honor of the Army, or the Marine Corps. Passengers of the promenade deck leaned forward in their steamer chairs and applauded.

Army officers gracefully paid their losses to Marine officers.

On the opposite side of the well deck the second-class passengers, gruff sergeants, sweated and swore, as they looked down upon defeat after defeat for the Army. How those graybeards cried bitterly aloud against the fact that the transport was carrying a load of recruits! Now, if they had a few old service men, some grim, lean privates returning from leave in the States, what a different story would be told!

A VOICE shouting for some one halted the ceaseless tirade of the puny one of the three on the forward well deck.

"Jimmy Deane! Jimmy Deane!"

One of the three rose to his feet.

"Here! What do you want?"

The newcomer stumbled through the semidarkness.

"Almost time for your bout, Jimmy. Better go and get ready. Say! Do you know who the Marines have got against you?—that guy Bill, old big Bully Bill himself! It's awful! The Marines have won the first two bouts a'ready, an' our poor devil in this bout is takin' an awful lickin'."

The puny one scrambled to his feet. The moonlight showed the alarm in his wide eyes.

"Gosh, Jimmy! You ain't goin' to box that big bully, are you? You ain't no match for him. He's knocked everybody cold so far this week. Man, he'll half murder you!"

Jimmy Deane laughed. He took the puny one by the arm.

"Come on, Skinny! Let's go get dressed. They say the first hundred lickin's are the hardest, an' I passed my hundred some time ago, I guess." Then he added soberly: "It sure would

give me great pleasure to lick that Marine, though."

Jimmy Deane was not exactly a novice at the art of boxing. Some might have gone so far as to call him a pug. He would have been, had he been better. He had boxed a few preliminaries back in the ward in Brooklyn. Once he had appeared on a card at Long Branch. But that was all. There had been as many defeats as victories chalked up after his name.

As in his boxing, so in the ledger of his life. As many defeats as victories. He had shifted from job to job. Not that he wasn't capable; all his employers would have admitted that he was. There was just a certain element missing in him. Persistence, or a force, the desire to keep driving to success.

This shortcoming bewildered Jimmy himself. He had tried to overcome it, and had failed—many times. Just as he had become settled to a new job, was going good, the old restlessness seized him. His work fell off. He knew the symptoms, and always resigned rather than wait to be told to leave.

Finally he decided upon the Army. At least, it was a job he was bound to hold for three years. Those three years might imbue him with a new force, teach him to stick. Thus he had found himself on a transport, a raw recruit bound for Panama.

THE big Marine climbed through the ropes. At the cheer which rose from his comrades, he smiled as does a king upon his subjects.

Jimmy Deane was resting quietly in his corner, his arms outstretched upon the upper ropes. A momentary thrill coursed through the soldier. His opponent was a massive chunk of man. Coarse, pugnacious features on a head

that joined lumpy shoulders without the graceful aid of a neck. The rest of the Marine's body was in proportion—knotted, hairy, and seasoned from many campaigns.

The Army officers looking down upon the canvas ring from the promenade deck sighed gently, and mentally bade farewell to the money they had bet the officers of the Marines on the bout.

From the after deck Army sergeants scowled down upon the ring. Another recruit going to be slaughtered.

There did appear to be some disparity between the two contestants. The Army entry, although well built, seemed to be slight, white-skinned, against his more primitive opponent.

The referee, a heavily-tanned Marine sergeant, with deeply seamed face, stepped into the center of the ring. He called the soldier and the Marine from their corners. Instructions.

A gong rang.

In the few steps Jimmy took to meet Big Bill, the entire scene impressed itself upon his mind. The sea of white blobs, faces of the soldiers and Marines crowding the ropes of the ring. Above, the forms of officers and ladies leaning against the rail of the promenade deck. Out of a corner of one eye he could just see the second-class passengers staring down from the after deck. Directly overhead, the dark, soft sky, with myriads of stars looking down.

The ship swayed beneath him. The Marines were yelling incessantly. They wanted a quick knock-out. The Army recruits were silent, depressed. They had not seen a soldier victory yet. They did not believe a soldier could lick a Marine; they had seen Big Bill in action before.

Jimmy soon found out that Big Bill did not know a great deal about boxing. And the Marine, who was not

devoid of a certain amount of cunning, discovered that the soldier facing him knew how to box, but did not know how to *fight*. Whereupon the set grin of confidence on Bill's face deepened, though his small blue eyes remained as hard and as glittering as ever.

The first round was Jimmy's, easily. His pretty footwork, his swift guard, his brilliant punches made the Marine look like a lumbering old hay wagon.

Accordingly, when the gong struck, a burst of cheering for Jimmy went up into the night air. At last the recruits had found a champion.

But over in his corner, while seconds swabbed the sweat from his face, Bill the Marine relaxed thoroughly, and without worry. He had catalogued his man. One more round. Or, at the most, two.

At the beginning of the second round Jimmy Deane danced lightly forward. This fight was easy. He could hit the Marine whenever and wherever he willed. Big Bill had as much chance of returning the compliments as an elephant trying to slap a mosquito stinging his ear.

It did not dawn upon Jimmy that his punches no more worried the Marine than the mosquito would worry the elephant. It took more than pretty boxing to put Bill out.

Jimmy had just got in and delivered a nice pair of punches, and was fitting away again. Easy. After this fight Big Bill would go kind of slow on the Army. When—

Big Bill tore in savagely, head down, and hamlike fists flying. Surprised, Jimmy was flung back against the ropes. He tried to put up his guard, and found that he could not. Those hammering fists beat through his arms, and smashed his body, his face.

When such a thing happens, a boxer

instinctively does one thing—grab his opponent, and hang on. But Jimmy Deane could not hang on. With his prodigious strength Big Bill whirled and threw Jimmy out into the middle of the ring.

The referee started to count. Jimmy took nine, while the recruits held their breath. Then he scrambled to his feet. The gong.

SOMEbody was rubbing his back where the ropes had bruised the white skin. It hurt. Jimmy was worried. That had been just an accident; he had let Big Bill catch him unaware, and sweep him off his feet. In the next round Jimmy would be more careful.

Yet, for all his arguing with himself, his explanations, a nauseating presentiment was filling the pit of Jimmy's stomach. The same thing had happened in other fights. In those, too, he had been the better boxer, yet the other man had beaten him down, punished him, licked him.

Jimmy knew that he had fought as hard as the other man. Yet his punches, for some reason, had had no effect.

The gong clanged for the third, and last, round. Both men advanced warily toward each other. Dimly Jimmy heard the excited yelling of the Marines—yelling for his blood. From the Army side of the ring, from the promenade deck, from the after deck—silence.

Jimmy kept his eyes fastened to Big Bill's face. It fascinated him. It evoked a feeling of horror, of revulsion. It almost frightened him. Those heavy, black eyebrows drawn together in determination, the clenched teeth, the strained features plainly showing hate, and the desire to smash, exterminate, win.

Jimmy had seen that expression before on other faces. In quiet moments, long after the fight, he had wondered about it. He was sure that his face never bore such an expression. How could a man feel that way? Why?

Jimmy struck first. It was a good blow, right over the left eye of the Marine, and drew red blood. Yet it seemed to do no more than to irritate Big Bill.

"Damn you, soldier!" snarled the Marine. "I'll kill you! Stand up an' fight like a man!"

At the same time, the burly Marine rushed. Although Jimmy was more prepared for it, nevertheless he found himself once more hustled against the ropes, and boxing for dear life to ward off the sledge hammer blows.

Finally he managed to escape, and regained the blessed clearing of the center of the ring. Now there was no bell to save him. Big Bill, clumsy, bear-like, came padding after him. Jimmy's guard was totally demoralized. He hid his face in his gloves. In a daze he heard the pandemonium reigning about him. Recruits implored him to fight—to go down fighting. Marines laughed, and cried to Bill to knock him off.

At last, desperately, Jimmy flung out his gloves, and lifted his head.

The after deck was squarely above him, directly in the line of his vision. For just a second, a second that held an hour's minutes, he stared straight into the face of a girl looking down upon him. He saw pity, pity for him, and—just a faint tinge of contempt. Out of the haze of all the faces and lights about him, that one face stood photographed on his brain.

Then he saw a brilliant, white light that filled his entire head. A million pinpoints of light began to detach themselves from it and radiate into a black void.

On the promenade deck Marine officers pocketed their winnings with an inner grin. On the after deck old Army sergeants swore and stumped away for a good night pipe. Below recruits, in their baggy, ill-fitting clothes, crowded miserably through the hatch.

A laughing, joking crowd of Marines were helping Big Bill take off his gloves.

"Say," boasted the victor, "I knew I had him from the start. Guys like him are pretty to look at all right, but they ain't got no nerve. Well, how many drinks does that make it you fellers owe me now? When we get to Porto Rico to-morrow, I'm sure goin' to have a heluva spree at your expense."

Over the rail of the after deck, a girl with wide eyes watched the seconds help Jimmy Deane across the deck.

PORTO RICO, "Rich Port," one emerald gem in Mother Atlantic's diadem. The harbor of San Juan, a glorious harmony of greens, roofed by cobalt sky flecked with white, fleecy clouds. On one side mountain ranges of darker green than the water which rippled lazily at their feet. On the other the long sheds at the docks, blistering from the heat of the sun. Behind the sheds, the closely packed houses of the old Spanish town. In the midst of the squalor of these, the simple beauty of Casa Blanca. Then, off on a point by itself, eternally staring out to sea, the grim sentinel of Porto Rico, the old Spanish fortress of Morro Castle.

The Ulysses lay at dock, and patiently sweltered. Most of the passengers were ashore, taking advantage of the one-day stop-over. First and second-class passengers were shopping, or

sight-seeing out at Morro Castle. But the men—the troops—having been confined in limited spaces for so many days, sought more heady thrills. From casemated windows many a dark-eyed *señorita* smiled not in vain; and a certain drug store on the central Plaza did a land-office business. Even to far-off Porto Rico had prohibition reached, creating bootleggers and rotten whisky.

Two things, in the Army, are incapable—guard and reveille. No matter what the occasion, or the holiday, there must always be some unfortunates who have to make up the guard.

One of these was Jimmy Deane. For the twentieth time that morning he pulled up the irksome web cartridge belt, his symbol of authority, that circled his waist. Even the bayonet hanging from it, as light as it was, seemed to grow heavy in the oppressive heat.

He leaned over the rail of the after deck, where he had his post, and stared idly at the black boys swimming in the water, waiting to dive for pennies tossed from the ship. A few feet from them, a black man dozed against his oars in a small boat. To him the boys would swim, when their mouths could not hold another coin. The old fellow would take charge of the money. Later, when the visiting ship had cleared the harbor, on another leg of its voyage, the old fellow and the boys would divide.

Ashore, on the docks, peddlers of tropical fruits, drinks, and confections, dozed beside their dirty carts. They all looked so lazy, so indifferent as to the outcomes of life. Just sitting in the sunshine, day-dreaming of castles, wealth, fair women. After all, was it not just as good to dream of them as to work to possess them? Dreaming was possessing—and work was so hard and uncertain.

Jimmy Deane was discouraged, down in the mouth. He should have licked the Marine. He could have, if—There had always been that *if* in his life. If he had tried a little harder. Yet he hadn't.

For hours before the fight, he had planned just what he was going to do with the Marine. Day-dreaming of how he had won the fight. Recruits were crowding about him, congratulating, admiring. He had taught the big Marine a lesson. The Army was free of his bullying. The girl was smiling proudly from the rail of the after deck.

But the actuality had been so different. It always was—for him.

Jimmy Deane gazed glumly at the idlers on the dock. In his contempt for himself, he saw himself in their class. Dreaming, dreaming—but never doing. Success, the plaudits of the multitude, are not made from dreams.

"GOOD morning!" interrupted a fresh, cool voice at his elbow.

Wide, brown eyes were regarding him in friendly fashion. Damp, brown curls, escaped from beneath her smart, tiny hat, clung to her forehead. Her small, red mouth was parted in a warming smile, giving a faint glimpse of the pearls behind.

She had caught him entirely off guard, and in his worst moment. He wanted to shrink into nothing, in order to escape those eyes which had stared down at him so pityingly the night before.

"It's so warm in town!" she breathed, while she sat down upon a near-by bench, and dropped her bundles beside her. "Isn't it almost time for us to sail?" she continued. "We're supposed to go at twelve, and it is nearly that now."

Jimmy's heart was thumping madly.

Lord! She was lovely! So cool-looking, so fresh, in all this heat. Who was she? Some sergeant's daughter, or—some corporal's wife? He stole a quick glance at her left hand. No rings.

They talked, and watched the stragglers come aboard the boat. Not once did she mention the fight of the evening before. Yet she must have known that Jimmy was the man who had been so disgracefully whipped by the Marine.

An ear-splitting blast from the whistle of the ship. Only a few minutes more. Then, good-by Porto Rico. A military band began to play, a plaintive, throbbing farewell song that fugged at the heartstrings. It made listeners think of all the lonely posts of the Army; of silent, tropical nights on guard, thinking of home—home, whether it be where the bullfrogs lonesomely croaked their weary melody, or whether it be the glowing lights of dear old Broadway.

Now there was a short, shrill whistle. The warning of the chief stevedore. The long gangplank, with its polished rails and snow-white canvas sides, was about to be taken away.

"Dum dum da-da-da da-da-da—" played the band. The venders, at last roused from their dozing, began a frenzied hawking of their wares. Unbidden tears rose to the eyelids of the officers and ladies whom the transport was leaving behind. Two months more before another transport would come steaming into the green and gold harbor of San Juan—two, long, lonesome, sun-baked months.

There was a commotion in the crowd at the foot of the gangplank. Three Marines broke through, and pushed each other up the gangplank, staggering and sweating. They gained the deck just as the third mate dropped his arm.

Away went the gangplank. Puffing tugs strained. Slowly, the giant nose of the *Ulysses* swung out toward open sea.

The three tardy Marines gathered together, and laughed uproariously at their narrow escape. Leading the drunken laughter was Big Bill. His small, deep-set, green eyes, bloodshot from the excesses he had engaged in since the ship docked, roamed viciously about, seeking some excuse to show off his cleverness. He was the king pin on this boat, and in addition to being drunk on rotten whisky, he was drunk on power.

HIS eyes came to rest on the after deck, on his victim of the previous evening, and on the fair girl beside him.

"Goin' up to pay a call!" he said to his hilarious comrades. "Goin' to pay a call on my frien'—the guy I licked las' night. He's got somepin that belongs to me. Got a good-lookin' girl. No yella recruit's got a right to such a good-lookin' girl. To the victor belongs the spoils!" he yelled. "Providin' it ain't too spoiled!" he added, and laughed boisterously at his own humor. His two friends echoed his laugh, and egged him on.

By now, the transport had got well out into the harbor. The tugs had cast off. Half speed ahead had been ordered. In a minute or two, Morro Castle would be off the bow.

Big Bill swayed uncertainly before Jimmy Deane and the girl.

"Whoosh your girl frien', recruit?" demanded the Marine, grinning. "'Troduce us, huh?"

Jimmy leaped to his feet, his face suffused with anger. The Marine was a hideous creature as he stood there, grinning and swaying. His uniform

was rumpled and spotted. His ugly face unshaved. His foul breath could be smelled yards away.

Jane Decker—Jimmy had found out her name—rose from her seat, gathered up her packages, and started to walk away.

"Aw, now, kid, don' go!" protested the Marine. He took a step as if to stop her.

Jimmy barred his path.

"Get out of here, Bill," he ordered. "You're drunk. You don't know what you're doing."

The words infuriated the Marine. He turned, and swung clumsily at the soldier. Jimmy ducked the barn door pass. It proceeded ponderously over his head, and struck the girl squarely at the nape of her neck.

Her packages went flying across the clean deck, and she herself, impelled by the huge power behind that swing, was knocked back against the rail, back—and over.

A horrified shout burst involuntarily from Jimmy's lips as he saw the slight, white-clad form hit the rushing water far below. Big Bill stood still, gazing dazedly at his fist. People were rushing to the rail.

"Man overboard!"

The cry was taken up by a dozen throats. A white life preserver hit the water.

"My God! Sharks!" cried a voice near to Jimmy. "This bay is filled with sharks!"

JIMMY gripped the rail until the knuckles of his hands showed white through the red. He had seen her break the surface. He saw her swimming desperately. What was he waiting for? Sharks! The word thudded into his mind dully, ominously.

Now, his hand was gripping some-

thing by his side. That smooth surface dragged his eyes down. The handle of his bayonet! He stared at it for an instant. He seemed to be without thoughts. Then, at last, decision came to him. He leaped for the rail, and the same impulse carried him into a dive.

Fighting desperately, he came to the surface. The water was warm, warmer than any he had ever known before. Strange such thoughts should be going through his mind now. Sharks lived in warm water!

He struck out swiftly. She was some distance away from him. He prayed that nothing would dart underneath the surface, pull her under, leaving nothing but red blood to dye the water. Not before he could get there. He prayed for speed. His arms and legs, weighted with their freight of clothes, were so heavy. He crawled so slowly, and his strength was decreasing.

She saw him coming. She was brave, struggling to meet him. He knew, by the look in her face, that she, too, understood. Sharks!

At last he reached her—and not an instant too soon. Her tired arms sought the support of his body. They grasped his soggy clothing. Her weight began to pull him down.

"Easy. Easy now, Jane—dear," he panted into the mass of wet curls in front of his mouth. He had known this girl hardly more than an hour, yet her name came so easily to his lips. In a faraway corner of his brain, which, curiously enough, functioned normally, seeming to be affected not a whit by the circumstances, he felt that her name had always been on his lips.

Attempting to swim, he found that his efforts only forced them both under water. She was relying wholly upon

him. That, and the weight of his water-soaked clothing made progress impossible.

Suddenly he bethought himself of the transport. He could not hold this girl up forever. Already his arms and legs were becoming fearfully tired, taking on the heavy quality of lead. If help did not come soon—

Help was on the way. The transport was turning about in a wide arc. Men were swinging out a lifeboat.

But the ship was so slow in turning. Why couldn't it hurry more? It was like a majestic old lady, who, having dropped a ball of yarn, was turning about slowly and comfortably to recover it.

There was a movement in Jimmy's arms.

"Let me go," said the girl. "I think I can keep myself up now. I was dizzy at first."

Her deep brown eyes were looking straight up into his. Their faces, sprinkled with glistening beads of salt water, were so close. Her lips, half parted, so full, ripe, and red like crushed strawberries, were there before him.

A madness seized him—a madness to crush his hard lips against her soft ones, to bruise them with the fierceness of his kiss. Such madness, in the tropics, takes men unaware.

She divined the intention in his eyes. As his head bent to hers, she pushed him away.

The madness instantly left him. His first feeling was one of pain. But quickly, contempt, contempt for himself rushed in to drive out that pain of wounded pride. Fool, fool, he thought to himself. She did not want him. On the ship, she was only being kind. She pitied him, for his licking that night. But women do not love the weak, the vanquished. Their affections are for

the conquerors—their pity, for such as he.

What a time, what a place for such an action! He had taken advantage of circumstances. In different surroundings, he would not have dared.

He released her.

HARDLY had she left his arms, when she grabbed him again, convulsively.

"Did you see it?" Her voice thinned to a shriek. Her teeth clicked together in fright. Her face had become paler than before.

There was a chill of horror in Jimmy's heart as he followed the direction of her terrified gaze. Not twenty yards away, a black fin, cruel, purposeful, sliced through the water.

Instinctively, his right hand groped for the bayonet still hanging from his hip. He could hardly make his grasping fingers perform the task of drawing the bayonet from its scabbard. They seemed numb. A peculiar thrill was running up and down his arm. It was as though his right arm had "fallen asleep."

The triangular fin zigzagged, but every diagonal dash brought it nearer the helpless couple, as they stared at it with fascinated eyes.

Jimmy had seen movie thrillers of natives duelling sharks. They had met the fish under water. The natives had held their sharp knives between their teeth. They had come up under the sharks from below, and had driven their knives clean up to the hilts, into the bellies of their enemies. Fascinating work, and the natives had always won—in the movies.

The black fin was closer now—only a few feet away. Jimmy could see the water on it, reflecting the diamond beams of the brilliant sunlight. He felt

a sudden sick sensation in the pit of his stomach. He glanced at the girl beside him. Her eyes were closed, as in prayer. She was moving her legs and arms faintly, just enough to keep her head above the surface.

Desperately, Jimmy looked toward the transport. The lifeboat was down, in the water. It was leaping to their rescue, urged forward by powerful sweeps of the oars. But it was too far away. That tiny, grim sail approaching would win the race.

All at once, the fin jerked under water. Jimmy's widened eyes stared at the swirl it left behind.

Knowledge burst upon his brain. The shark was making its last dash—a sprint, as it were, for the prize. Then, a savage rending of flesh and bone by needle-sharp teeth.

Jimmy lunged forward to meet the attack. He fought the water in front of the girl.

At first, his slashing bayonet and smashing fist found no resistance. Then, suddenly, he felt a sharp pain at his left thigh. He whirled. The pain increased. A dimly heard scream behind him told him that blood had come to the surface.

With all his strength, he drove his bayonet to the left, and down. It struck solid meat with such force that his wrist was wrenched. The bayonet was snatched from his fist as if it were taken by some irresistible giant. Dark, red blood, in streams, dyed the surface of the water. His blow had gone home.

Jane cried out again, and struck out to meet him. It was evident that she had no other thought but that he was wounded to death.

They met. Once more he had her in his arms.

"Didn't get me!" He was breathing hard. "Got him instead!"

"I'm so glad! Oh, I'm so glad!" she kept repeating over and over.

He looked at her strangely. This hysterical tone, this wild, vast relief, were they for a man whom she merely pitied?

He glanced away from her, across the gentle waters of the harbor, to where the lifeboat was approaching. In a minute or two, they would be picked up. Saved. And she would thank him. Her father and mother would thank him. Then they would go on to wherever they were going, and he would get off at Panama. His life would be the same. Another bust.

HIS musings were shocked from his mind. With suddenly narrowing eyes, he studied a small object between them and the lifeboat. He hoped closer scrutiny would prove his first startled glance wrong. No. Again a tiny black sail, identical to the first! In some uncanny way it had scented the fresh blood. Behind it, Jimmy thought, would come others. Some one had said that the bay was filled with sharks.

He looked toward the lifeboat again. It still was some distance off. He waved one arm frantically. Some one, standing in the bow of the boat, waved back. All the world like a lark in some safe harbor in northern waters!

Jimmy tried to keep Jane from seeing the deadly fin approaching them. But, she, too, had been eagerly watching the progress of the lifeboat. Finally she saw the fin.

Mutely, she turned her head toward Jimmy. The fear, the frustrated hope written large over her face wrenched at his heart.

Mentally, he cursed the sharks, the ocean, the slowness of the lifeboat. If he had the bayonet back again! Now they were defenseless, save for his two

bare hands. But those, he knew, he was going to use.

He maneuvered to place himself in front of her.

"No! No!" she cried, and struggled to his side. She was so tired. It was becoming a tremendous battle for her to keep her head above water.

"You must not do it! It isn't fair!"

He drew her into his left arm. Her eyes expressed her gratitude for the rest that gave her.

Jimmy looked away. The lump in his throat was hard to swallow.

Nearer and nearer sped the fin.

Jimmy was treading water with his feet, and paddling with his right arm. Just a few seconds more. He clenched his eyelids to shut out the terrible picture crowding into his mind.

The lifeboat was drifting! What was the matter? Had they given up hope of reaching them? Curse them!

A sharp report cracked across the water into Jimmy's ears.

He stared. Once more the boat took up its course. In the bow a figure crouched. In his hand was a rifle ready for instant use.

The fin had disappeared!

"We're all right!" he shouted into Jane's face. The relief was more than his bursting heart could bear.

"Oh, I love you! I love you!" he cried.

Her eyes slowly opened, and seemed to study the clean-cut face of the man beside her.

"And I love you," she whispered.

JIMMY was still in a daze when they dragged him from the water. She loved him! She loved him! He couldn't believe it. Why, she loved *him*—Jimmy Deane, the quitter! She had seen him take a disgraceful beating, when he could have won; she had seen

him make a weak remonstrance to Big Bill, instead of throwing the drunken sot boldly off the deck, as any other man would have done; she knew what kind of a man Jimmy Deane was—and yet she loved him.

The Marine was waiting for them when they climbed up the sea ladder of the transport. His face plainly showed the anxiety he had suffered, the terrors he had felt in his big, brutish heart. They had completely sobered him. It was not that he cared particularly about the two he had plunged into the sea, to face the perils of drowning, and sharks. He feared the punishment that would come to him, if fatalities resulted.

Jimmy met him at the top of the ladder. Cold, relentless anger filled his being as he looked into Bill's gross features. For the first time in his life, force—a force driving, impelling him to kill—surged through his veins.

He took a step forward, and with one furious blow, knocked the surprised Marine to the deck.

Many hands grasped him, held him. Big Bill scrambled to his feet, his face colored a dark, ugly red. Hands seized him, too, and held him back.

Like two wild animals, the soldier and the Marine tugged to get at each other. The crowd of olive drab uniforms thickened about them. Recruits stared in awe at the water-sodden soldier, suddenly gone berserk, straining to reach the man who once had easily made mince meat of him.

"Damn your yellow hulk!" cried Jimmy. "If I ever get free, I'll smash you like the big toad you are!"

"Yah!" snarled Bill. "An' I'll do the same to you as I done las' night, see?"

Suddenly, Jimmy calmed. He shook off the detaining hands, and walked to the bully.

"Listen, Marine!" he said. "You and I are putting on an exhibition match to-night. Get it?"

The challenge was issued. Soldiers and Marines crowding the well deck awaited the reply.

"Okay, brother!" sneered Bill. "But what I done to you las' night ain't nothin' to what I'm goin' to do to you t'-night. You get that?"

He stuck his huge jaw into Jimmy's face. It was all the soldier could do to keep himself from pasting it then and there. But he held himself in.

There were reasons. Men like Big Bill could stand a licking. What hurt them most was to receive that licking in public, in front of those whom they had bullied for so long. Jimmy Deane felt that above all things he would like to have another chance at Big Bill—before her eyes.

It never occurred to him that the Marine might lick him again. He had forgotten Bill's greater strength. Forgotten also was the three-inch gash in his side, made by the shark's quick slash.

But Big Bill saw the wound. His narrow eyes were making a note of it for his cunning brain.

THE soft tropic night was pregnant with unguessed possibilities. A high, high moon silvered the vast stretches of black water. The white ship plowed ever south as the Southern Cross tipped itself rakishly to view what was going on.

Again the officers were wagering on the promenade deck. Again surly sergeants glowered down upon the boxing ring below, while their buxom wives sat beside them complacently, and their daughters flirted with the corporals among the crowd of men beside the ropes.

The white glare of the spotlights picked out the opponents in opposite corners.

Once more Jimmy Deane rested his arms along the topmost rope. Despite his refusal to admit it to himself, he was tired, extremely so. He had had almost no rest since his perilous experience in the water at midday. First, his wound had had to be dressed in the ship's hospital. Then, for the remainder of the afternoon, he had been under a fire of questions from a board of officers appointed to examine into the whys and wherefores of the "accident." He had had to exert his wits to keep them from finding out. If he had told them about Big Bill, the Marine would have been thrown into the ship's brig for the rest of the voyage; and that did not at all fit into Jimmy's scheme of things.

"Skinny" Devlin, the little fellow with the big hate in his heart for the Marine, was Jimmy's second.

"Guy," he crooned, as he began putting on Jimmy's gloves, "go get him. He's yellow as hell, the fat stiff. His beef is all that gets him by. Lick him once, boy, an' you'll have the everlasting gratitude of every dog-goned recruit on the ship. You can do it easy, son. Jus' step into him, an' let those punches go. Don' hold 'em back like you did las' night. Jus' put all you got right behind 'em. It won't take many of 'em, kid. He's made of putty, that dumb guy is."

Skinny's words drifted into Jimmy's ears, but their meaning did not reach his tired brain until some seconds after. "Don' hold 'em back like you did las' night." The words stuck in his mind. They meant: don't pull your punches. Pulling his punches—that's what he had been doing his whole life. Pulling his punches.

Perhaps he had done so because he

had been yellow. Perhaps he had not the nerve to let fly. A man, be he a good one or bad, fights. The coward goes so far—and dreams the rest.

Jimmy Deane clenched his teeth, and his fists inside the gloves. Why didn't the starting gong ring? •

Once, he glanced upward to the after deck, and found the face of a girl, pale from the terrible experience she had undergone. She tried to give him a brave smile, but fear gnawed in her heart, and made the smile pathetic. She was afraid, afraid of what Big Bill was going to do. Sitting apeline in his corner, he looked so brutal, so unmerciful.

The fighters had returned to their corners. The gong struck. "Watch out for your side!" cried out Skinny to the retreating back of his man. The girl nervously clasped her hands.

"**C**OME on an' take it, rookie!" taunted Big Bill.

Jimmy Deane tore into him. For the first time in his life, Jimmy was fighting. If he could have seen his own face, the teeth ground together, the parted lips, he would have seen the same fighting face he had seen on other men, and wondered about.

The Marine, too, was a fighter. The first round was a glorious slugging match. It was the kind of round which keeps spectators on their feet yelling, and punching the air in sympathy.

Again in his corner, Jimmy sat hunched and taut on his stool. The round had taken more out of him than he had thought it would. His side held a gash of fire.

Yet he could not relax, rest. A driving, relentless force permeated his whole being. He was impatient at the rest interval. He wanted to be out there, pounding, smashing that huge, hairy bulk to pulp.

Again the gong.

Big Bill fainted for Jimmy's face, and drove a terrific right straight into the bandage on the side.

As the soldier staggered back, the Marine taunted: "Howja like that, rookie? Come again."

Now a mad rage possessed Jimmy's mind. He closed in, smashing wildly, and every blow struck resoundingly upon Big Bill's body.

Apparently the Marine was bewildered. He retreated before that furious onslaught. Then, suddenly, his right laced out again, found its way through Jimmy's open guard. Once more on the wound.

"Oh!" Pain was in the girl's sharp cry.

"Rotten!" "Yellow dog!" growled the recruits.

The Marines were silent, thinking. They were not proud of what their champion betrayed about himself.

Big Bill's sneering smile of confidence changed to an ugly scowl. He understood the attitude of the observers. Well, to hell with 'em! He was hitting above the belt. Tough if the other guy had something the matter with him. If anybody didn't like the way he was fighting, let him step up next.

This time, the Marine stepped in with fury and ugliness creditable to a man-eating shark.

Again his huge, hairy fist found its way to that injured side.

The referee, the same old Marine sergeant, caught Jimmy as he staggered.

"Let me go! Let me go!" cried Jimmy, the tears of pain and rage streaming unheeded down his face. "Let me at him! I'll kill him!"

The Marine sergeant was a judge of men. He had been through many wars.

He had seen men, half shot in two, in just such fighting rage. He knew those tears. And he had seen them on the cheeks of men smashing the enemy's line into a thousand little bits.

"Go to it, then, Buckoo!" he murmured, "an' knock his bullyin' head off." With one hand, he hurled the soldier into the advancing Marine.

There was no pulling of punches now. There was no hanging back. No mere boxing. Every blow of the soldier fell like a sledge hammer, with all the driving force behind it that had been stored up for years.

Big Bill concentrated his efforts upon the bloody bandage. The bandage fell off. The blood streamed down the white skin, and onto the floor. Yet the soldier fought on, seeming to be insensible to pain.

No one could stand up forever under the terrific blows that rained down upon Big Bill's head and shoulders. He had dropped his guard entirely in order to devote his whole attention to pounding the wounded side. His strategy had failed.

Now he brought back his hands to protect his head. Too late! He began to retreat to get away from those merciless blows. But they followed him.

Almost blinded, he shunted from rope to rope, and backed, with ever-increasing speed, from corner to corner.

The yellow streak at last broke through. He had ceased to be a fighter, and had become a fear-stricken animal trying to escape punishment. Jeers from the raw recruits and from his late comrades, the Marines, followed him around.

The old Marine sergeant stopped it by rushing in, seizing Jimmy's hand by main force, and holding it aloft. From all sides, thunderous cheers rose,

the Marines vying with the Army to see who could cheer the heartiest for a game fighter. Big Bill slumped in his corner—alone.

THE jungle hills of Panama were black and mysterious under the radiant silver of an early morning moon. Despite the lateness of the hour, some people, still unable to sleep in tropic heat, were resting calmly in their steamer chairs.

On the Army promenade deck, a major and a captain were enjoying their cigars.

"You say," asked the captain, in an incredulous voice, "that you knew all

the time that the Marine had knocked the girl overboard!"

The major gently knocked the ashes from his cigar.

"Yes," he replied. "A sergeant's wife witnessed the whole episode. But when we had Deane up before us on that investigation, I guessed the way the wind was going to blow, so I kept her testimony quiet until the next day. I had got damn' tired of seeing those Marines win every bout; and you could see how crazy Deane was for a comeback. Game, that lad; he'll go far." He stood up, and tossed his cigar over the rail. "I won all my money back, too."

THE END.

A Lost City

IT is hard to believe that an Aztec city, a wealthy Indian city never seen by white man, still exists in Mexico, just as it was in the fifteenth century before the time of Cortez. Yet among the natives of Sinaloa the legend of this Lost City of Bacis still persists.

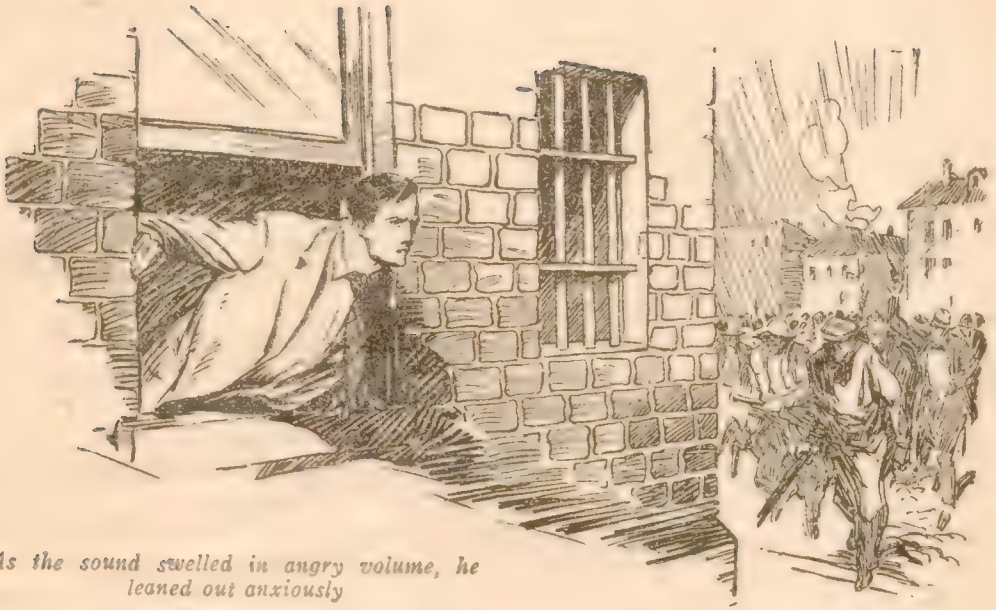
To substantiate their claims, the peons about Culican remind you of a little river which brawls out of the impassable Sierra Madre mountains; and they tell you that these waters constantly wash down oranges, strange carvings, and beautiful, finely woven cloth caught on twigs. They also remind you that no white man has ever visited that wilderness of crags above, that even the sure-footed burro cannot find a possible trail.

Among those crags, they say, nestles the Aztec city with rich fields, and orchards, and palaces stored with gold and precious stones; that there are strange *teocalli* temples where virgins are still sacrificed to Huitzilopochtli, and that the people live to-day just as they did in the time of Montezuma.

A rumor persists that there are local Indians about Culican who have actually seen the Lost City of Bacis; and that they know a hidden trail, but will not reveal this road, because they wish to guard the secret of their ancestors.

Many a hardy prospector has put faith in the strange tale, and vainly searched for a pass into the mountain-walled wilderness. Perhaps in the near future, the legend will be proved or disproved by some ultra-modern prospector, daring enough to fly an airplane over the mountains. And if the city does exist, if he should really land in it, what strange adventures he would meet!

Lloyd Eric Reeve.



*'As the sound swelled in angry volume, he
leaned out anxiously*

He'd Be His Own Son

*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde had nothing on Larry Kane as he attempted the most
fantastic and perilous of masquerades*

By GARRET SMITH

Author of "Thirty Years Late," "The Girl in the Moon," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

LARRY KANE, orphaned at an early age when his namesake father is drowned, looks far more than his nineteen years when he is working as a carpenter in the Western town of Palington. Borrowing his boss's car to take out Alice Pomeroy, nurse in the household of the town politician, Horace Lane, he runs into a hold-up where two victims are killed. Alice plays on Larry's chivalry to make him marry her and flee from the scandal; but when the papers accuse Larry of stealing the car and staging the hold-up, his bride takes his money and

leaves him. Larry, trapped by circumstances, flees.

A year later, bearded, scarred, looking nearly forty, he appears in Flowerville, N. Y. There he befriends young Louise Sturdevant, saving her home from foreclosure by the real estate man Sybel. For ten years Larry, who uses his first and middle names, Laurence Rockwell, prospers, and falls deeper in love with Louise, who looks on him as a fatherly friend. Sybel, vindictive, somehow discovers he is Larry Kane, but Larry bluffs him. Then he thinks up a scheme.

This story began in the *Argosy* for September 28.

"Old Man" Laurence Rockwell, really thirty-one, but apparently in his fifties, tells his lawyer, Forsythe, that he is Laurence Rockwell Kane, unjustly charged with the Palington outrage and unable to prove innocence. He makes a will leaving all his wealth to his "son," also named Laurence Rockwell Kane; leaves a blood sample for identification, and starts out, ostensibly to search for the lost youth. Larry plans to become his own son (letting Laurence Rockwell be thought Larry Kane's own dead father).

He fakes a drowning of Laurence Rockwell on a lake steamer. Shaving, having his face remodeled and made more normally youthful with plastic surgery, and dyeing his hair dark, he hunts up some third cousins, who had lost track of him and his father, and convinces them he is Larry Kane. Then he goes to California and does the same with a boyhood employer.

He cannot understand why Forsythe hasn't advertised for the missing heir—himself, of course. While he is waiting for this, he goes on a camping trip; and is arrested for the Palington murders!

CHAPTER X.

IN THE TOILS.

LARRY KANE returned to the California town of Palo Eltona handcuffed to the thwart of the deputy sheriff's canoe. He was in the depths of despair. His captor proved taciturn, and Larry was able to learn nothing of the evidence against him. He decided presently to say nothing beyond sticking to his story that he was innocent. Let the burden of proof rest entirely with his accusers.

But he was almost shaken out of his steeled reserve, on being arraigned before a justice in Palo Eltona, when he found himself confronted by Horace Lane, the Palington politician, in whose household his wife had been acting as nurse when he met her. With him was Frank Cable, the contracting carpenter for whom Larry had worked in Palington and from whom he had borrowed the car for his fateful night of play that had ended so tragically.

Something in the way that Lane looked at him made Larry feel that he was recognized. Cable seemed not so sure but stood studying him closely. Larry remembered the mysterious vindictiveness of these two men, particularly of Lane, as reported in the newspapers immediately after the crime. If they identified him positively he would have no adequate defense.

"Young man," said the justice, "you are known around here as Larry Kane, Laurence Rockwell Kane in full, so reads the charge sworn out by Deputy Sheriff Graves. You are accused of being the Larry Kane wanted for a highway robbery and double murder committed on the night of June 10, 1916. What have you to say to this charge?"

"My name is Laurence Rockwell Kane, known as Larry Kane, but I am absolutely innocent of this charge," Larry testified. "I was out in the woods alone about the time of this robbery and may not be able to prove an alibi, but I can prove that I am thirty years old at the present time and would therefore have been not quite nineteen when the crime was committed, instead of the thirty or more credited to this robber at that time. That is all I have to say at present."

"Here are two witnesses who knew the Larry Kane wanted for the crime,"

the justice went on. "Mr. Frank Cable of Palington will testify. What was your acquaintance with the man wanted?"

Cable told briefly of Larry's employment with him over a space of six months and of his stealing his car on the afternoon preceding the robbery.

"Is this prisoner the Larry Kane you knew?"

"He is."

Larry's heart missed a beat.

"That is all, Mr. Cable. Mr. Horace Lane, also of Palington, what have you to say?" the justice continued.

Lane seemed to be struggling to conceal some strange agitation as he stepped forward. Larry was certain there was a glare in the sidelong glance he cast at Cable.

"This is all a mistake. This man is positively not the man wanted for the Palington crime," he said vehemently, to Larry's surprise. "I knew that man well by sight. He worked for several months on a building going up next to my place. I noticed him when he first came on the job and picked him as a bad one. I had been active in law enforcement, particularly in suppressing the epidemic of banditry around our city. I inquired about this man and found he had apparently come to Palington from nowhere and no one knew anything about him. I was greatly disturbed when I found him showing an interest in my children. I feared it was a ruse to learn about my household preparatory to robbing it. On the afternoon before the crime I found him in my yard playing with the children, and ordered him out. I couldn't mistake him. This man looks so little like him that I am surprised Mr. Cable thinks otherwise."

Again he glared at Cable, who stared back half bewildered, half defiant.

What could this mean, Larry wondered. The man who had gone out of his way to prove him guilty originally was now rushing to his defense!

"Your honor," Lane spoke up again, "I urge you to discharge this man promptly with due apologies and see that the arrest has no publicity."

THE judge was perplexed in turn. He apparently held Lane in considerable awe.

"There seems to be a deadlock in the testimony," he said. "I can't see my way clear to dismiss the prisoner at once, but I have only a desire to see justice done. I will detain him in the custody of the sheriff for twenty-four hours to give time for other witnesses to be found. If there is no one else then who can swear to his identity, I will be glad, of course, to release him. Meantime I give orders that no public notice be made of his detention."

Larry thereupon became a nominal prisoner in the local jail. He was allowed to occupy a room in the sheriff's quarters instead of a cell and he was merely kept there under guard.

That evening he was surprised to receive a call from Lane. Again, as the man came in, Larry had a curious feeling that Lane had really recognized him.

"I've called to see if there is anything I can do for you, Mr. Kane," the politician said smoothly. "I am desperately sorry this mistake has been made, but I'm sure it will be cleared up promptly. If it isn't, you can count on me for funds to defend you in case you are not flush yourself. I'm interested in law enforcement both ways."

"Thanks," Larry said, a little coolly, in spite of his efforts to hide his feelings. "I have some funds, however."

"You weren't by any chance a rela-

tive of the Kane who is wanted, were you?" Lane asked. "There is a slight resemblance, no more than the normal one between relatives."

"I don't know of any relative who answers his description or who would be likely to commit such a crime," Larry replied with open coldness this time.

"No offense intended," Lane said hastily. "There's a black sheep in almost every family. By the way, that middle name of yours interests me. Is that a family name?"

"Rockwell was my mother's maiden name," Larry told him truthfully.

"I used to know a man named Rockwell in the East. I wonder if he was a relative of yours," Lane persisted and Larry started inwardly. Again he had the feeling that Lane knew more than he admitted. Larry was more than ever on his guard.

"I don't know of any living male relative of my mother's," Larry told him, again truthfully.

Lane was silent for a long moment. "Look here," he said finally, "I want to see you well out of this scrape. I know you are innocent, but there's no knowing how many witnesses that bull-headed Cable may dig up to swear you are the bandit Kane. I've got a lot of influence. I can see that you are released to-night, and help you out of the country. In fact, I know of a good job in the Philippines I can place you in right now. It isn't just the chance of conviction I'm afraid of for you. There's a lot of mob spirit around town. I've heard more than a little talk this evening of a lynching party."

Larry considered this thoughtfully. There was a trick behind this somewhere. Why was Lane so anxious to get him out of the country, anything to avoid his conviction? He decided to

have nothing to do with the fellow, although the peril he pointed out might be very real.

"Thank you just the same," Larry told his caller, "but I'm innocent, as you say, and I'm not going to convict myself by flight. I'll face the music and take a chance on getting justice somehow."

Again Lane was silent for a moment. Then he arose abruptly.

"Very well," he said irritably, "if that's the way you feel, I can't do anything for you. Don't say I didn't warn you. Good night."

Lane stalked out, leaving Larry to his bewildered and unhappy thoughts.

LARRY could make nothing of Lane's attitude. Was the fellow lying about the danger of a lynching party? Larry was too disturbed to make any effort at sleep. He was sitting near the window of the darkened room near midnight peering anxiously out upon the dim street when he became gradually conscious of a distant murmur of many voices.

Curious at first, then alarmed as the sound swelled steadily in volume, he leaned over the sill and listened with taut nerves. Then he saw it. Around a corner a block away swept a mob of men yelling themselves into a frenzy and firing guns in the air as they advanced toward the jail.

The prisoner drew back from the window, slammed it down and locked it. As the shouting throng neared the jail, the sheriff and several guards appeared on the sidewalk with drawn weapons. He could hear momentarily the booming voice of the sheriff trying to make himself heard above the tumult. Jeers and shots answered. The defenders drew back into the building and locked the main door in the face

of the mob's ringleaders. There were more shots, then a moment of silence.

Remotely he could hear an exchange of loud voices. One was the sheriff's. Then the roar of the mob was renewed. A moment later there was a sound of heavy blows and then the crash of splintering wood. He heard scuffling steps of many men in the corridor as the sheriff and his handful of guards resisted to the last. Then the door of his room crashed open. Rough hands seized and bound him. He was dragged out to the street and thrown into a car. The shouting mob followed as the car went into gear.

"Step on it," commanded the man in the seat beside Larry.

The driver obeyed, and the car shot forward, barely missing some of the mob milling around in front of it. As they slipped by the men on foot, the shouts of triumph suddenly changed to exclamations of surprise, then of rage. Shots flew over their heads. Looking back Larry saw several other cars start in pursuit.

A few minutes later they were out of the little village speeding up a long winding grade toward the foothills. At each bend the captive could see a string of gleaming lights speeding in their wake but gradually losing ground.

Whether he was in the hands of rescuers or of a mob of lynchers Larry had no means of knowing. No one spoke to him or made any effort to undo his bonds, from which he got no encouragement. He became presently resigned to the expectation of ending this flight at the rope's end without further formality of trial.

At length the road entered the dense woodland and a little further on the car turned off on a narrow dirt road that led upward steeply, compelling them to crawl in low gear. They

stopped at what seemed to be the summit of a ridge. Larry was dragged out by his seatmate, assisted by the second man in the driver's seat. Then the driver went on with the car and the other two men propelled Larry on foot through a narrow trail, pitch-dark except for occasional gleams from a pocket flash in the hand of one of the men.

Finally one of these fitful flashes revealed the log side of a cabin just off the trail. They stopped. One of his escorts unlocked a door and he was pushed into the cabin. Working swiftly in the darkness, the men undid the bonds that confined his wrists, then he heard them withdrawing. Larry decided there was to be a delay in the lynching, if, indeed, such had been the purpose of his capture. He found his voice at last.

"Wait a minute," he called after them. "What is this all about?"

"It ain't necessary for you to know," a voice replied. "If you don't try to start anything, you won't be hurt, not for a while, anyhow. Meantime you're just company and askin' no further questions."

THE door slammed and a key turned in the lock. Presently he heard a low murmur of voices beyond the heavy log wall, but could distinguish no words. Evidently there was a second room in this cabin, occupied by his captors. Exploration of the walls with his fingertips revealed a barred window and a single door as the only openings in this part of the cabin. Beyond the door the voices were a little more distinct, but still there were no recognizable words.

Larry guessed that this was an inner room accessible to the outside only through the next room where his cap-

tors would doubtless stand watch turn and turn about. There seemed to be no present chance of escape. Larry was suddenly overcome with weariness. Feeling about he found a bunk furnished with pine boughs. He threw himself down and fell sound asleep.

Light shone through the barred window when he awoke. Without, he had only a view of dense foliage; within were four bare walls, his bunk and a rough stool. He was still lying down, trying to puzzle out the situation, when the door was unlocked and a stockily built man in a plain business suit entered, bearing a breakfast of bacon, eggs and coffee. The man's face was entirely covered by a mask. He sat the tray on the floor and departed without a word, locking the door after him.

This struck the keynote of many days to follow. Three times a day a masked man brought him food, and always in silence. All Larry's attempts at enlightenment were met by that silence. He came no nearer to a satisfactory solution through days of brooding. Someone had been bent on saving his life and at the same time keeping him a prisoner. That some one, he reasoned, might be Lane, but what purpose could the fellow have? Why had Cable, the carpenter, been so sure that Larry was the man wanted, and why was Lane equally sure he was not? Larry was so confident of the completeness of his disguise that he could conceive of nothing but his name that could have made him suspected in the first place. He had known of that risk, but had been quite confident of his ability to neutralize it.

All the time he was wondering what had been going on in Flowerville. Why had Forsythe delayed so long in advertising for him? He had a strong pre-sentiment that there was some connec-

tion between this delay and his present predicament, but any theory he devised to account for it seemed ridiculous.

Always he was haunted by the face of Louise Sturdevant. Had she mourned long or deeply for her old friend Daddy Rockwell, he wondered, or had she by now been made to believe he had been a hunted criminal, perhaps come to hate his very memory?

But as day after day went by, checked off by Larry with scratches on the log wall of his prison, a new worry possessed him. While he was cooped up here *incomunicado* they might be advertising for the Rockwell heir—might be making some other disposition of the property. In desperation he tried again to learn from his captors how long they intended to keep him prisoner. Again he was rebuffed.

Then, hopelessly at first, he began trying to devise a method of escape. As a last dubious hope Larry took the case knife brought with his evening meal and began prying at the log into which one set of ends of his window-bars were embedded. To his amazed delight a big splinter of the log gave way. Hastily he put back the splinter and hid the knife in the dirt flooring. This was barely accomplished when his jailor returned for the empty tray as usual. Larry held his breath and watched him, but the fellow failed to notice the absence of the knife.

TWO hours later Larry had chipped away the last bit of log from around the bolts holding the ends of the bars into the log sill. To wrench back the bars and crawl through the window took only another minute. He was free again, standing in thick underbrush in the blank darkness of the forest outside the cabin.

But even now, when he should have

been making the best possible speed away from that dangerous locality, curiosity held him. As he worked at the bars he had heard the low drone of voices the other side of the wall. If he could catch a little of that conversation, it might throw some light on this puzzle.

Slowly he felt his way around the wall of the cabin and presently found himself under a window. There was a faint glow of light through some kind of rough draping. Cautiously, he found a minute slit in the window-covering. To this he placed his eye.

In the dimly lit cabin sat two men playing cards. One was a stockily built blond with a heavy mustache, the other a lean, dark, smooth-faced fellow.

A moment later the dark man threw down his hand.

"It's all yours, Haskins. Anyhow, I'm through for the night. I'll take a turn and see that everything's all right, then hit the hay and leave you to your watch. I hope Lane doesn't keep us on this lousy trick much longer. If he does, I'm for quitting cold. I don't see why he didn't croak this guy to begin with, or let that lynching party he organized go through with it."

"You forget Lane wasn't sure whether this is the guy he's afraid of or not. Whether he is or not, Lane may be able to milk him as long's his name is Kane. We ought to hear before long whether the rest of the trick has gone through O. K. Even if it has, this guy might spill the beans if we let him loose. Of course if Kane says to croak him we'll have to do it. He's got the goods on us. Don't forget, Peters, that if Lane speaks the word, it's the chair for ours."

"I'm not forgetting it," Peters snarled and started for the door.

Larry hastily drew away from the

cabin. By good luck he found under his feet the hard surface of the trail over which they had come to the cabin a month ago and hurried along it as fast as he dared go without running the risk of making a noise that would betray his escape.

He was free. Also he had learned something. This was, as he suspected, a plot of Lane's. Also he had the names and descriptions of two of his accomplices. But he was still in the dark as to what it all meant—why Lane wanted him held.

The wisest thing now was to learn what had been happening in Flowerville and get on the scene as quickly as possible consistent with safety from the law. Here was a dilemma. If he was still wanted in Palo Eltona on the charge of being the bandit Kane, he stood a good chance of being arrested before he could get to Flowerville. Moreover, he could not travel without money, and all his money had been left in charge of the sheriff at Palo Eltona. If he was wanted he would be arrested anyhow on appearing and declaring himself in Flowerville. He would be no worse off if he went openly to Palo Eltona and claimed his money.

IT occurred to him that he might feel his way a little by going to the nearest city and consulting the newspaper files for an account of his near lynching. Just after dawn he had the good luck to stumble on a highway and presently caught a ride into the nearest town, the little city of Bridgeville. He now felt safe from pursuit by his kidnapers. The next thing was to get at the newspapers.

Evidently Lane had been successful in his avowed intention of keeping the details of Larry's arrest out of the papers, for the account he found under

date of the day following the incident was brief and ambiguous and omitted Larry's name. It answered his purpose, however, because he learned that he was no longer wanted by the police.

"There is much mystery surrounding the attempted lynching and escape of a prisoner at Palo Eltona yesterday," ran the account. "The prisoner, whose name has been withheld by the authorities, was said to have been detained merely on suspicion of being a bandit wanted for an old crime in this region. At midnight a mob broke into the jail and took the prisoner out. Unknown friends of his spirited him away, however, and he has not been heard from since. This morning it was learned positively that the prisoner was not the man wanted and the impulsive citizens of Palo Eltona are in a chastened mood. The only witness to identify him as such admitted he had been mistaken. In view of the error, the authorities have ordered all publication of the details suppressed."

"Good!" Larry exclaimed. "That leaves me free now. If anybody makes that mistake again, I'll just refer them to the sheriff of Palo Eltona."

He glanced over the succeeding numbers of the paper to see if the story had been followed up, or if there was any hue and cry after the Rockwell heir. Suddenly he stopped and clutched the page convulsively. This headline danced out at him:

**COURTS UPHOLD ROCKWELL HEIR
BIG ESTATE GOES TO KANE BOY**

**Youthful Ward of Horace Lane, Palington
Politician, Inherits Property of Eastern
Real Estate King in Mysterious Will**

The story stated that the heir, a Laurence Rockwell Kane, was only eleven

years old and had been a ward of Lane since his birth. Lane had put in a claim in behalf of his ward immediately after the death of Rockwell. The details of the will had never been made public.

Evidently there had been other stories which Larry had missed, for the astonished and enraged reader learned nothing as to the ground on which Lane had made the claim. Here was a clew to Lane's strange recent actions, though the meaning was not yet fully clear. But this much stood out with stunning force: Fate had played Larry a sardonic trick.

He had created a fake heir to the man Rockwell whose legal death he had brought to pass. He had killed himself as far as the law was concerned, in order to reappear and claim his property as his own son; and another fake heir had slipped in ahead of him.

Larry Kane had not only lost his estate. He had destroyed his very personality. As far as the law was concerned, he was twice dead.

CHAPTER XI.

THE ROCKWELL HEIR.

WHILE he was waiting in Bridgeville for his baggage, including his funds, to be sent on to him by the sheriff of Palo Eltona, the distracted and bewildered Larry Kane set himself to a long session of careful thought.

Somehow the wily and powerful Lane had tricked him, but the more Larry thought the more muddled the whole thing seemed—Lane's connection with his secret marriage, his zeal in pressing the false charge against him, his equal zeal in defeating that charge now, his backing the threatened

lynching from which he had rescued Larry only to keep him a prisoner.

One thing seemed clear. The man had feared that any publication of Larry's name might defeat his plot to put over a false heir, even though he was not sure that this was the Larry Kane who had crossed his path once before.

The rest was all a muddle. Gradually, however, Larry evolved the hope that in Flowerville he might possibly defeat the fellow yet. It was only a slight hope. He had based his whole plot on the supposition that his claim as heir would be so obvious and uncontested that his story would not be tested too closely. It would be quite different to go to court in a bitterly fought battle to prove his own false counterclaim. Nevertheless, he resolved to go to Flowerville and feel out the situation and see what his chances were.

It was mid afternoon when he reached the city where he had been such a familiar figure for eleven years. Here he knew he must put his new personality to the supreme trial of facing his intimates, those who were familiar with his every gesture, the tones of his voice, his tricks of pronunciation.

For months Larry had been consciously checking all his little characteristic habits and, as far as possible, breaking himself of them. He had even cultivated a few slight oddities of speech in place of some he had carefully discarded. Fortunately his new teeth had given his voice a slightly different resonance.

He had not long to wait for the first test. On the station platform he met face to face a man who had worked with him on his first job in Flowerville. They had been fast friends ever since and had done a great deal of

business together. Larry almost yielded to a momentary impulse to shout "Hello, Jim!" As it was, he caught the man's eye before he quite checked himself, and the other noticed his stare and returned it questioningly. Larry decided to push the test to the limit. He stepped up to the other.

"Pardon me," he said, "would you mind telling me which is the best hotel to stop at in this town?"

"Why, I'd say the Union Central," the other told him, studying the inquirer closely. "Are you a stranger here?"

"Why, I came here once before, a dozen years ago or so," Larry replied, "but I didn't try any of the hotels. Thanks for the tip."

And Larry hurried away, uneasy under his friend's gaze.

"I'll bet he had the feeling he'd met me before somewhere," he thought.

Larry went at once to the hotel his friend had recommended and boldly registered as L. R. Kane, in a new back-handed style of writing he had been carefully cultivating, one as different as possible from his old scrawling penmanship. It would fool any one but an expert, and even he might see in it only the resemblances often found between the writing of parent and child.

A YOUNG man leaning across the hotel desk beside him as he registered, glanced curiously at the signature, then at Larry.

"Pardon me," he said. "My name is Thurston, reporter for the Flowerville *Target*. I noticed your name. Are you a relative of the boy, Laurence Kane, who has just inherited the Rockwell money? You've got the same initials and all."

Larry laughed.

"There are a lot of us Kanes in the country, but I could never figure out any relationship to any of them with money. I'll have to look the boy up and see if he's a long-lost cousin or something. No, I'm afraid I don't know anything to tell you about him. Why? Is there any mystery about the case? I've just come from the wilds of the far West and haven't been watching the papers."

"I'll say there's a mystery. The contents of the will were never fully made public and there are rumors that this boy heir, who had never been heard of before, is really a son of old man Rockwell who was lost off a boat on the lakes over a year ago. There's even a report that Rockwell's real name was Kane and that he was the bandit Larry Kane, who killed two men out west twelve years ago."

"Is that so?" Larry exclaimed. "I remember that case, I was just a youngster then and it made a big impression on me because the name was like mine. Have a cigarette?"

The reporter accepted and gossiped on, Larry apparently interested only as any stranger might be in a choice bit of scandal about well-known characters. Finally the reporter drifted off without a suspicion that this stranger was in any way connected with the case. Larry had always avoided reporters since coming to Flowerville, but he remembered this man as one who had interviewed him on two or three occasions. The impersonator of himself, as he thought whimsically, had met the test twice already, before two pretty clear-eyed witnesses. Now for Forsythe, his lawyer.

On his way to Flowerville Larry had thought out a method of approach that would enable him to get a line on just what had happened without mak-

ing any dangerous revelations of his own plot prematurely. With his peculiar information he might be able to puncture Lane's plot, throw out the young impostor, and punish the plotter. Then he could present his own claim. Lane's kidnaping venture might be twisted into evidence in Larry's favor, he thought, as he entered the building in which the Forsythe and Rockwell offices were located side by side.

But with all his effort at self-assurance he was trembling almost visibly as he passed the familiar door to his own office suite and turned into the next one, occupied by the attorney. The young woman at Forsythe's information desk looked at him politely without the slightest recognition, though the face of Laurence Rockwell had been familiar to her for years. She looked startled and glanced up curiously when he said that Mr. Kane would like to see Mr. Forsythe on personal business.

Mr. Forsythe would be at liberty in a few minutes, she told him, after an inquiry over Forsythe's extension. He sat down nervously and became absorbed in another mental rehearsal of the story he was to tell.

"Good afternoon, Larry."

Larry Kane almost jumped to his feet in surprise at this unexpected remark of the girl at the information desk. He saw at once, however, that she was not looking at him but at a handsome, alert boy who had just entered.

"Good afternoon, Miss Brown," he answered politely, "is Miss Sturdevant in?"

"Yes, she's with Mr. Forsythe. Did you want to see her right away? I can get her on the phone."

"Oh, no. I'll wait."

At the mention of Louise Sturde-

vant, Larry nearly fled. So she was beyond the closed door opposite him! In a moment he must face her, too! He had not counted on that. Impulsively he arose to tell the girl he couldn't wait and would call again. But she was giving her attention to the boy with peculiar deference.

SUSPICION dawned on Larry that this boy was the false Rockwell heir. "Larry," she had called him.

The older Larry began a fascinated study of the interloper. He was a tall youngster, but with a well-molded, slender figure that at once aroused the other's admiration. The paper had described the heir as eleven years old. This boy, then, was tall for his age. He might have passed for fourteen.

"Miss Sturdevant was going to put me to work this afternoon," the boy volunteered shyly. "I'm going to work in the office after school and all day Saturdays."

"Huh!" the girl exclaimed. "If I had all that money I wouldn't go to work."

"I think it will be sort of fun," he said. "Mr. Forsythe said I ought to know all about the business if I am going to run it some day, and Mr. Lane thinks the same thing. A boss ought to know how to work first."

He ended with an engaging grin. Larry Kane liked his namesake in spite of natural prejudice against the interloper. Larry always had a weakness for youngsters and this was a particularly attractive one. He was haunted by a feeling that somewhere he had seen this boy before. There was something vaguely familiar about him. He was interrupted now by the door opening behind him and a voice that was undoubtedly familiar.

"Hello, Larry," said Louise Sturdevant to the boy. "I'll be right with you. This is Mr. Kane? Mr. Forsythe will see you now, sir," she added to the older caller.

At the first sound of her voice, Larry had turned his back and affected to be studying a print on the wall. He did not trust himself to look at her now.

"Thank you," he said in a strained voice and went through the door she had left open, without catching her eye.

Face to face with his lawyer and old friend, he paused, shrinking within himself as he waited for possible recognition. Forsythe looked up and studied his features closely for a moment.

"You say your name is Kane, sir? What can I do for you?" he said at last, continuing to study his caller's face.

"Well, my call is one of personal curiosity," Larry began, as coolly as he could manage. "If you are busy, I won't bother you till later. I have just come from the far West, where I have been in isolation for some years recovering my health. Meantime I had lost track of my family, including my own father. I am trying to get trace of them, particularly to learn whether my father is alive or not. When I read of the death of Laurence Rockwell of this city, I was interested, as Rockwell is my mother's family name and my name is Laurence Rockwell Kane. Then when I read that an heir to the Rockwell estate had appeared with that same name, I decided to come East and see if this was not a branch of my family and if I could learn anything of my father's fate."

"I see," Forsythe remarked. "Your story interests me, particularly as there

are in your face suggestive resemblances to the Kanes of this family that I have met. You are not by any chance under the impression that you might profit financially by proving a relation to the testator?" he added suspiciously.

"I have stated frankly my interest in the matter," Larry parried. "A man's will is a matter of public record, of course, and as a possible relative, I assume I would have a ground for demanding the details. But, of course, you can have no objection to telling me what you know about this man's family connections. Here are my own credentials. Please examine them and, if necessary, look up the references I can give you as verification. I assume that this will is valid and that whatever my relationship, if any, I have no possible hope of claiming any of the estate. All I ask is to be satisfied that this Rockwell was not my missing father and then I will make you no further trouble."

FORSYTHE looked distinctly startled. He studied his caller's face for a moment, then read the certificates he had presented. For a moment, he was lost in thought.

"I think it will be better for all concerned to set your mind at rest without further delay," he said at last. "In order to shield the memory of the dead man and save the feelings of his heir, we succeeded in keeping most of the details out of the papers. If I had been obliged to make any search for the heir, I would, of course, have discovered these records you present. But the heir was brought forward immediately after Mr. Rockwell's death with such convincing proofs that it made all search unnecessary. When I tell you that Laurence Rockwell was a fugitive criminal, you will have no

further desire to prove that he was the Laurence Rockwell Kane here described as your father."

While Larry looked on speechless, the lawyer searched his files and laid before him a voluminous typewritten document. Dumbly Larry read it with growing amazement while the mystery that had surrounded his marriage was cleared up. Some of his new information he read between the lines. From the typed pages and what they clearly implied he learned for the first time who his wife really was and what had been the reason behind her strange actions and long silence afterward.

Alice Pomeroy, Larry's long-lost wife, was no hired nurse, but the orphaned stepdaughter of Horace Lane. Alice's widowed mother had married Lane. A few years later the mother had died, leaving, besides Alice, three children by Lane. Mrs. Lane had a considerable fortune in her own right, and she left the bulk of it to Alice, with the proviso that Alice should remain the ward of Lane until her twenty-fifth birthday, unless she married in the meantime. During her wardship, Lane, her guardian, had the use of her property.

Lane, it was evident, had made Alice the slaving Cinderella of his household until Alice, in revolt, had seized upon the chance of her impromptu marriage with Larry as a means of escape.

Then had happened the highway robbery in which her bridegroom had been seemingly implicated on her wedding eve. Alice, light and selfish, had fled back to Lane and got him to use his influence in suppressing the news of her wedding. Lane, through his political influence, had secured the marriage certificate and held it for future use, keeping all notice of it from publication. This much Lane had admit-

ted. Much more Larry clearly inferred.

Evidently Lane had held a club over the girl, keeping her and her money in his power. He knew if her husband was revealed and proved innocent, Alice would be free again. Therefore, he had done all in his power to nail the guilt on the fugitive. After Rockwell's death, it was now evident to Larry, it would have been very embarrassing to Lane if Larry had been caught and proved to be the bandit and the husband of his ward. That would have spoiled his plot, to prove the rich Laurence Rockwell the husband of his late ward and the father of her child.

For, within the year after Alice fled, she had given birth to Larry's son and named him Laurence Rockwell Kane, Jr.; but it had cost her her life.

At this point in the reading, Larry was so overcome that it was almost impossible for him to go on. He felt the eyes of Forsythe upon him and it took every effort of his will to hide his emotions.

So his own son had really inherited the Rockwell property—that boy who, on sight, had so tugged at Larry's heart. Now he knew why the boy had seemed vaguely familiar to him. Those had been his own eyes and brow and figure, along with the dark wavy hair and delicate chin of his mother, the dead Alice, from whom Larry had been free all these years without knowing it.

He had the son he had always wanted, found him only to lose him again.

LARRY KANE knew even before he read any farther in this amazing document that he could never unseat the heir to the Rockwell property. It was equally out of the question to

unravel the plot he had concocted, or to go through with it and prove that he was the heir and this boy an impostor.

He knew instinctively that this boy was no impostor. Larry's eyes saw too clearly in the little fellow's face the marks of his parentage. And the evidence presented in writing had proved it beyond any possible doubt to the court that had passed on the case.

On a trip East, a few months before Sybel's attempt to blackmail Laurence Rockwell, Lane had heard of Laurence Rockwell and had visited Flowerville quietly. He had seen the object of his search without revealing himself to him, becoming convinced that this was the man he had been hunting for. Apparently he had hooked up with Sybel as the man who, being Rockwell's enemy, would be most likely to help him in a blackmailing scheme. At any rate, at the time of Sybel's attempt, they had not quite cinched their evidence, which was why Larry's bluff had worked for the time being.

But after Rockwell's death, Lane came forward with the written record of Laurence Rockwell Kane's marriage to his stepdaughter, Alice Pomerooy. The signature of Laurence Rockwell Kane on the marriage register was proved by experts to be in the same hand as specimens of the writing of Laurence Rockwell. There was the family resemblance between the boy and Rockwell. Finally the test was made of the sample of blood Larry had left behind to prove his own case. It had, naturally, checked with the boy's blood to the satisfaction of the court.

Larry noted no mention of his own supplementary affidavits when he made the will of Laurence Rockwell, in which he fixed age and birthplace of

his supposed son. He inferred that Forsythe had suppressed them to avoid any possible scandal, inasmuch as he was convinced that the boy was the true heir.

"Did your client, Laurence Rockwell, confess to you that he was the Larry Kane wanted for the banditry?" Larry asked Forsythe tentatively.

"No. He admitted he had been suspected, but denied his guilt. But there was no doubt of his being the man," the lawyer replied. "The fact that he attempted to deceive me as to his own true identity adds to that belief. He made his age and that of his son greater than was actually the case, in supplementary statements made at the same time as his will, probably to protect himself from suspicion as long as he lived. He was going to give me more exact data for the identification of his son, but died before he did so."

Larry was doing some rapid thinking. Whichever way his mind turned led only to despair. It would do no good for him to declare that Laurence Rockwell was not dead, that he and Laurence Rockwell were one and the same. His plot had been too clever. Laurence Rockwell had been declared legally dead. Larry had so carefully wiped out the traces of each step of his change into his present personality that he could never prove himself the same man who left Flowerville as Laurence Rockwell. But, suppose he could prove it; that would simply mean condemning himself to the chair as a murderer.

There was the alternative of going through with his plot, of proving that Laurence Rockwell was also his father by an earlier marriage. That would mean a long and dubious legal fight which might result in his sharing his own estate with his supposed half-

brother, who was really his own son. More probably it would fail and he would get a prison term as an impostor for his pains. But suppose he should succeed in proving Laurence Rockwell and his own father were one and the same. It would mean branding his own father's memory as that of a murderous criminal. It would mean publicly putting upon his own son the shadow of criminal parentage. Already Larry Kane loved that son with all the force of his warm-hearted nature.

"**T**HANK you, Mr. Forsythe," he said at last, looking up from the document. "I am quite satisfied that Laurence Rockwell was not my father, and thankful to have my mind set at rest on that point. He was evidently a younger man than my father and of quite a different nature. I guess I shall have to become resigned to the belief that my father is dead as I have feared for many years now. This man may have been a distant relative, but I assure you, if so, I shall be content to let sleeping dogs lie. I'll say nothing of what I have learned. Just forget that I have called."

"I appreciate that very much, Mr. Kane," the lawyer told him cordially in parting. "If I can be of any service to you at any time let me know."

"Thank you. I am looking around for a place to settle and go into business now that my health is restored. I like the East, the little I have seen of it. I may decide on your city."

In the reception hall on his way out, Larry met Horace Lane face to face. Lane recognized him instantly as the man who had been arrested in Palo Eltona and later kidnaped by his order.

Larry recovered first, as he had expected this meeting sooner or later.

"Why, how do you do?" he exclaimed. "You are Mr. Horace Lane, the man who came to my rescue awhile ago when they were trying to make a bandit out of me, in Palo Eltona. Glad to have the chance to thank you again. I came near regretting not letting you help me get out of jail. You heard what happened to me?"

"Why, it's the other Larry Kane, sure enough!" Lane exclaimed, covering his momentary confusion as he realized Larry held no apparent grudge against him. In communicating with the sheriff of Palo Eltona after his escape from Lane's kidnapers, Larry had made no mention of Lane in connection with it. He had not wanted to start anything then, and even yet he preferred to lie low till the right time came to use the evidence against Lane. Perhaps he would never use it, now that he knew the man's connection with his own son. But he could hold it in readiness as a club if the boy was not treated fairly.

"I heard some newfangled lynchers kidnaped you and that you escaped," Lane went on. "Glad to see you again. What are you doing here?"

"Why, I was in the East and natural curiosity led me to call and see if your ward was any relative of mine. I've lost touch with most of my family. I'm afraid, if we are related, it's pretty distant. Are you living here in town now?"

"Yes. I've decided to come East and help look after my ward's property till he comes of age."

Larry was seeing danger signals when they parted, not so much danger to himself as to his son. Lane, doubtless, would try to play the same trick on the boy that he had played on the boy's mother.

"It's up to me to stay in Flowerville

and stand guard," he told himself, "now that I'm free."

Yes, he was free now, free from the wife he had never loved, free from his own unlucky past. He had a little money left to start over with. And he could stay near his own son, even if he could never claim him.

Above all, there was Louise. Maybe he could win her after all.

CHAPTER XII.

BUSINESS WAR.

LARRY'S first real meeting with Louise Sturdevant took place the next morning after his return to Flowerville. It was the final test of his new identity.

He had gone to Forsythe's office that morning with the audacious purpose of getting a job with the old company he had lost. The lawyer was in conference in the Rockwell Company offices, they told him, and when he called there Louise Sturdevant received him.

"You are Mr. Kane, aren't you?" she asked when she saw him. "Can I do anything for you? Mr. Forsythe will be busy for an hour. He has told me about your call yesterday. How interesting that you may be related to poor old Mr. Rockwell! We were all very fond of him."

Larry inferred that she had not been told of the stigma overshadowing his name.

"I came to see if there was any job I could get here," he told her, coming straight to the point. "I've made up my mind to stay in Flowerville and I'd like to learn the real estate and building business. I've got a little money I could invest in it, perhaps. I'm willing to start at the bottom."

"Why, I don't know of any real

opening at present," she told him, "unless you wanted to try selling on straight commission. There's always a chance for that, but Mr. Forsythe employs those men, in consultation with Mr. Lane since he came on to represent his ward's interests. I employ the office staff, but I've no openings at present."

Larry had a feeling that Lane would block him, even if Forsythe was willing to take on a man who could give so little account of himself. But in getting a connection here he would be near his son and perhaps protect him from his tricky guardian. Also he would be in daily contact with Louise Sturdevant.

"Suppose while I am waiting for Mr. Forsythe you tell me about the business, if you have time," he suggested.

For an hour they talked, Larry adroitly getting from her an account of the main progress of the business since he dropped out, and his admiration of her grasp of the situation growing as she went on. His love for this girl had merely increased through absence. He was confident now that she did not know him. It gave him a peculiar thrill to feel that at last he was talking to her as one her own age, free to woo and win her. If he could succeed, the loss of his property would be small cost to pay.

Forsythe, as he had expected, expressed polite doubt as to his ability to use him on such meager credentials; but when Lane came in, to Larry's surprise his former enemy again championed his cause.

"Why, sure," Lane said. "Mr. Kane is just the kind of a man we want in our organization. Put him on the sales force and give him a good drawing account. You see, we have

met before out West and I had occasion to look him up."

Rather nervously, Larry thought, Lane told of Larry's arrest in Palo Eltona and the part Lane had played. Larry caught Lane eying him apprehensively once or twice as he talked, and came to the conclusion that the man was afraid of him. He might well have been, Larry thought, if he had actually been aware of how much the new salesman knew.

That noon in his hotel Larry wrote a long letter to a detective agency in New York, relating for the first time his kidnaping experience in detail. He asked them to assign a man to the job of running down Peters and Hawkins, his kidnapers in the West and to put another on the job in Flowerville to watch Lane. He was determined to lay that oily little crook by the heels before he had a chance to misappropriate his son's fortune.

THEN he settled down again to the old business he had founded under the name of Laurence Rockwell, the business he knew better than any one else connected with it, so well that his only difficulty lay in not betraying a knowledge so seemingly uncanny that it would arouse suspicion.

From the start he proved to be their star salesman. In six months they made him sales manager. Larry fancied that Lane had to swallow hard over this move, but dared not block it. He was sure the man in no way suspected his real identity, but was uncertain how much his kidnaping victim knew about Lane's part in that affair, and was running no risk of testing strength at present. Some day, Larry knew, the fellow would strike as he had before; and he was constantly on his guard.

Meantime Larry and Louise were in

daily contact and seemed to be the best of friends. At times he fancied, or hoped, he detected a little more than mere friendship in her manner. Then again he would be in despair over her seeming coolness.

Young Larry Kane, however, had taken to his unsuspected father from the start. They soon became fast friends. The boy looked to Larry to teach him the business and was very much in earnest about it. Larry became steadily more devoted to this son of his whom he could never claim.

It was shortly after he became sales manager that Larry discovered the first long-looked-for signs that Lane was bent on milking the company, his ward's interests included. Some of Larry's best deals unexpectedly fell through. Larry's superior secret knowledge of the affairs of the company enabled him to estimate pretty closely what the net earnings for the first six months of the year should be. The statement given out by the office fell a long way short of it.

Meantime the detective working locally with him reported that Lane and Sybel were in on some secret deals. The crooked little real estate man was strangely prosperous these days in spite of the beating Larry had given him just before his supposed death. Then the detective reported that Lane was juggling the stock of the company, selling heavily stock that properly belonged to young Larry Kane, his ward. Sybel was working with him on it.

It was obvious that Lane was unloading his ward's holdings and appropriating to himself, probably, the biggest share of the proceeds. Then, doubtless, when by depressing the company's business the stock had fallen in price, he would buy back in his own name.

Larry saw a chance to checkmate this move and at the same time win back control of the business he had lost. Taking what remained of his little funds with which he had left Flowerville, and adding it to his large earnings in commissions, he began secretly buying this stock as it was unloaded, and securing proxies of other stockholders. When his funds were exhausted, he secured large loans from the banks, using his stock already bought as security, and buying more stock on margin.

A week before the next annual meeting Larry found himself within sight of control. His own stock, plus such proxies as he had pledged and the proxies of Louise Sturdevant and Forsythe if he could get them, would give him voting control.

Now he must convince those two. He decided to begin with Louise and then get her to persuade Forsythe. That evening he called at her home and told her the story of Lane's secret manipulation and his plan to thwart it.

"I'm not seeking office myself," he assured her. "I feel certain Lane plans to throw Forsythe out of the presidency and take the office himself, probably throw you out, too, and have things his own way. All I want to do is reelect you two and throw Lane out, making sure at the same time that the boy's interests are protected. I'm devoted to that youngster, you know, and I don't want to see him robbed."

"I'm with you," she said heartily. "But why did you come to me first? Why didn't you take it up with Mr. Forsythe?"

Larry gulped. He had made a sudden resolution. In his pocket his fingers closed over the old luck piece he had carried ever since Louise gave it back to him the day he left Flower-

ville. Impulsively he drew it out and held it up to the light to make sure it was the right coin. Yes, there was the familiar date. He thrust it back into his pocket with a little prayer that it might again bring him luck. Then he turned to her with desperate courage, and answered her question.

"I came to you first because you are the one I know best and trust most. I love you, Louise. If I win this battle will you be my wife?"

Tears sprang to her eyes and she turned away.

"I'm sorry, Larry, but I can't. I like you, but I have been in love for a long time with a man who isn't free to marry me at present. I'm waiting for him."

Larry stared at her for a long moment while despair closed around him.

"I'm sorry," he said simply, and abruptly left her.

CHAPTER XIII.

SHOW-DOWN.

LARRY KANE, perhaps fortunately as it happened, had little time to eat his heart out over this refusal from the girl he had loved so long. Next morning he was summoned to the bank where he had made his heaviest loans on stock, and was told that they would have to call the loans. They gave no reason.

When he could not produce the money, they took over the stock and refused to give him the voting proxy on it. In his morning's mail at the office were letters from several individuals who had given him proxies, recalling them. His scheme had been smashed overnight. There was no longer any hope of his going to the annual meeting with a voting majority.

What had happened was obvious. Lane had learned of his scheme and brought pressure to bear on the banks by some wile in which he was skilled. He had also reached enough individuals to make victory certain.

There was one desperate chance left. Larry secretly summoned the detective working with him in Flowerville and told him the story.

"Do you suppose you and your pals out West between you can stir up enough more evidence before the meeting to warrant Lane's arrest?" he asked.

"We can no more than try," the detective told him. "The Western operatives reported last week that they were hot on the trail of the Peters and Hawkins who, you say, kidnaped you; and they think if they got that Palington carpenter, Frank Cable, into court, he might tell something interesting about why he identified you as the bandit when you were arrested in Palo Eltona, and then took it back again. I'll wire them to bring things to a head double-quick."

Two days before the date of the meeting, things seemed to break Larry's way. Word came that the kidnapers had been arrested and that Hawkins had agreed to turn State's evidence. Lane was promptly arrested and after a hot fight against extradition was taken West for trial. Larry went along as a witness. Needless to say, the meeting of stockholders of the Rockwell Company was indefinitely postponed.

The story Hawkins told on the stand at the trial left Larry Kane open-mouthed in surprise.

Hawkins and Peters themselves had committed the robbery near Palington of which Larry Kane had been suspected. Hawkins testified. They had

never heard of Kane till afterward. The man in the second car that night, later identified as Larry Kane, had been an innocent bystander, and had a girl with him who fled into the bushes just before the crash with the car the bandits had robbed. Peters had done the shooting, meaning to fire over the victims' heads.

» The two bandits were members of a Palington gang who were political henchmen of Lane's. He had run them down and steered the police away from them, telling them he wanted to pin the robbery on Kane, who had married his stepdaughter. As long as she had a living husband he would lose control of her property.

Twelve years later Lane had come to the pair again. The man Kane, he told them, had been identified as Laurence Rockwell of Flowerville, and Lane was after the Rockwell estate through Rockwell's son, Lane's ward. Another man named Larry Kane had just turned up in California and had been arrested on suspicion of being the wanted bandit. Lane was pretty sure he was not the man, but he was afraid his arrest might "gum the game" if it received publicity before the courts had finally passed on the claim of Lane's ward. Lane wanted them to kidnap the prisoner under cover of a lynching party he was starting, and hold him till after the Rockwell case was settled: "croak him if necessary," Hawkins quoted. Unfortunately the prisoner had escaped and Lane had been afraid of him ever since.

Cable, the carpenter, another henchman of Lane's who had had a falling out with him, had pretended to identify the prisoner as the bandit, out of spite. Lane had bullied him into making a retraction later. Cable verified this evidence.

Then Larry Kane took the stand and for the first time told the story of his kidnaping in full and what he had overheard Hawkins and Peters say on the night he had escaped from the cabin where they were holding him.

"Are you a relative of the Laurence Rockwell Kane hitherto supposed to have been the bandit, who later lived and died as Laurence Rockwell?" the prosecutor asked him.

"Not as far as any family records show," Larry replied truthfully, "though, of course, I may be, judging from our common family names."

THE prosecution rested at this point, confident of conviction.

There was a hurried consultation between the defense and their counsel, then their trial lawyer asked for an adjournment for twenty-four hours, "on the ground that a new witness has been heard from who may be able to impugn the testimony of the prosecution."

The request was granted. Nevertheless Larry Kane left the court room that day jubilant. Nothing the defense brought in could upset the fact that his name was cleared at last. He was free, no matter what happened now.

When court was convened again, the lawyer for the defense arose.

"Your honor," he said, "I wish to introduce a witness who has agreed to turn State's evidence in another crime, in order to show the utter untrustworthiness of one of the witnesses of the prosecution. I shall back this up with the sworn testimony of three other citizens. John Peters will take the stand."

Peters denied absolutely that he had been present either at the Palington robbery or at the kidnaping of Larry Kane twelve years later.

"Did you ever see the Laurence Kane who is present here to-day as the chief witness of the prosecution?" the lawyer asked.

"Yes."

"Tell the circumstances in your own words."

"I was hiding out in the desert in Arizona in 1918 when I came on this Kane hiding out, too, from some job he said he had pulled in Colorado. He was broke and tired of hiding and so was I.

"We drifted up here to Palington, and one night held up an auto with two men in it, on the Ridge Road, ten miles west of the city. The papers had a lot about it, but we never was caught."

While Larry Kane listened to this perjured testimony and fumed with rage alternating with despair, two supposedly reputable citizens of Palington were produced and described themselves as the victims of the robbery in question, and unhesitatingly identified Larry Kane and Peters as the two bandits. The facts of the robbery were verified from police records submitted in evidence. Again Horace Lane had turned one of his wily plots. The defense counsel turned and addressed the judge.

"Your honor," he said, "I demand that the evidence of Larry Kane in this case be thrown out as being unworthy of credence, and that Kane be arrested and held for trial in this other case."

Before the judge could reply, there was a tumult in the back of the court room.

"It's a lie! I demand the right to testify!" called a woman's voice.

Larry jumped to his feet in amazement and looked back. Louise Sturdevant was coming down the aisle, followed by Forsythe. Larry had not

known they were in the West. When the excitement had died down there was a hurried consultation. At last the judge called the court to order again.

"This is rather irregular," he ruled, "but no more so than some of the testimony of the preceding witnesses. I have let some things pass in the interests of justice, and will instruct the jury as to what part of it they may regard. This new witness may testify as far as what she has to say bears on the reliability of Laurence Kane."

"**H**OW long have you known this Laurence Kane?" Larry's lawyer asked Louise Sturdevant.

"Thirteen years," she replied defiantly, and again Larry Kane nearly jumped from his chair in amazement.

"How well have you known him?"

"He lived in my house most of that time and we worked together after the first year. I was his private secretary till a little over a year ago."

"Where was he on the night when he is accused of taking part in this second crime?"

"He was at my home in Flowerville, New York, where he had been daily since he came to Flowerville the year before. The date of this robbery happened to be the same as the night he told me in my own living room that the business he had started in Flowerville had suddenly made a big success."

The listeners, all but Larry and the lawyers who had been told the true facts, were highly mystified at her statement.

"Was this Larry Kane living under his present name at the time?"

"Part of it. He was known then by his first two names, Laurence Rockwell. He had suppressed the Kane be-

cause he was hunted for a crime he had never committed, a charge he was not freed from till yesterday in this court."

The spectators got this, and there was a hum of amazement. The judge rapped for order.

"Do you mean to say this Larry Kane here present is the same man as the Laurence Rockwell reported as dead for over two years? Explain yourself."

"He is. Laurence Rockwell, no doubt, fell off that boat as reported, but managed to escape somehow. I don't know how, because he has never confided in me. Remember, he was a supposed fugitive from justice. When he found he was believed dead, he evidently changed his appearance and came back unrecognized in an effort to free himself from that false charge before he declared who he was. Remember, it was in that way he found his son whom he dearly loves, and he would have lost him again if he had declared himself before he was free from that Palington charge."

"What proof have you of all this?"

"I can give the same proof that was the final evidence of the identity of his son. Before he went away as Laurence Rockwell, he left a blood sample to be used in identifying his son. That sample is still in existence. You can test his own blood by it."

"But how are you so sure?" the lawyer persisted. "Evidently his other associates never recognized him."

Louise blushed and then turned pale. She was silent for a long moment. Then she looked up defiantly.

"No man can fool a woman by any disguise when—she cares enough for him. I knew when I first saw him he wasn't as old as his beard and wrinkled

face made him seem. I couldn't help knowing him when he came back."

THERE was much more legal red tape before the tangle into which Larry Kane's plot had got him was cleared away and Lane, Sybel and company were on their way to prison. Enough to say that Larry escaped without ever confessing that he had conducted his masquerade with the intention of reappearing as his own son. It was only to Louise, long afterward, that he admitted the whole truth on the day that she added another son to the first one that had been given Larry by the lost Alice.

Now, the first moment they were alone together after the sensational trial closed, he turned to her and held out his arms and she rushed into them.

"Louise," he whispered, "why did you nearly kill me, the first time I asked you, by telling me you loved another?"

"I didn't," she told him. "I said I loved a man for a long time, who wasn't free to marry me. I had loved you ever since you jumped into my flower-bed after hitting me in the face with your luck piece, but you weren't free to marry me till you had proved your innocence of that old crime."

"Good old luck piece!" Larry murmured. "I've got it yet."

"I know it," she laughed. "You took it out of your pocket the night you proposed first. I recognized it by the date when you held it under the light. To tell the truth, Larry, I wasn't sure till then that you were really the Daddy Rockwell I loved, though I'd suspected it. I knew nobody else would have our luck piece."

"Good old luck piece!" Larry Kane repeated. "Let's go back home and give it to our own son."



Hard-handed switchmen leaned tensely over the crystal-gazer

Box Car Seer

Rick Willetts and his partners were boomers—drifting railroad men—who preferred to work their fellows rather than their regular shift

By WILLIAM EDWARD HAYES

RICK WILLETTS folded his muscular arms across his deep chest, leaned back in the wooden kitchen chair and gazed blankly at the dirty dishes left from supper. A shadow of doubt crossed his mind, an inner voice whispered that Jimmy's idea, while it sounded good, would turn out in the end to be all wet. Just like all of Jimmy's ideas for the accumulation of easy money.

Jimmy Tripp, Rick's running mate, apparently sensed Rick's unvoiced apprehension. Sitting opposite Rick in the combination kitchen and dining room, he leaned forward and gave the table an emphatic bang.

"Now just look at it like this," Jimmy exhorted. "You go round to these here vaudeville shows. That mind readin' they do is all fake, an' they get big dough for it. Now you know somethin', Rick. You already had a good memory, an' by studyin' hard on that memory course you stole off that hogger in Milwaukee—"

"I didn't steal them books," Rick corrected. "Like I said, me an' that hogger got intimate in a speakeasy, an' when I woke up I had 'em."

"All right," Jimmy went on, "but you had to study 'em, an' practice a lot, to get so's you could just look at a switch list, for instance, an' then

rattle off every car number an' initial on it from your mind."

"Yeh, I had to practice," Rick admitted.

"Well then, what the hell's the drawback to usin' them powers to take a little money offa these switchmen? I got it all worked out like I told you. We got us a crystal ball like we seen that Turk at the fair ground with. That'll make it look mysticlike. I'll pass the word around the yards that you're clairvoyant. See? These dumb snakes'll wanna know what that is, an' then I'll lead up to it easy. We'll let 'em write out their own lists of things. You take a quick look at it, like you been doin' with me, an' then I'll bet money you can call them things in any order they want. See. Why, it's like bettin' on daylight comin' after six o'clock. Sure."

"An' supposin' we cross up with the night slave-driver?" Rick queried, referring affectionately to the yardmaster. "Or these yard bulls? Like that feller, Snell. He's a mean gumshoe. You can tell it by lookin' at him."

"We won't worry none about that," assured Jimmy. "We'll do this thing right. You leave it to me."

RICK caught Jimmy's contagious grin, and decided to let Jimmy handle the matter. Rick, however, couldn't help but think about all their fine resolutions of a week before to stick to straight railroading. That was after their reunion before the crew board in Belmont Yard Office.

They'd been separated for almost three months because of a slight unpleasantness in Pocatello, Idaho, where, as switchmen in the night yards, they had innocently become involved in a bootlegging mess. It had been every man for himself on the night the shoot-

ing started, and Rick had gone one way while Jimmy had hightailed it the other.

"Boomers" both, they had drifted from one road to another, finally to meet halfway across the continent.

Now that they were together again in the middle of the State of Indiana, catching what work they could on the extra board at Belmont yards, the scheme that these two boomers were hatching up certainly couldn't be called straight railroading, nor could it be classed as conducive to good morale, discipline, or peace of mind.

Rick and Jimmy together had been up against about every problem railroading could offer. They had started out together at the age of twenty-one to see how many railroads they could work for, and now, after ten years, there weren't many untried.

As was their custom, they were "shacking up," as they called it. They had decided to stick around Indianapolis for three months, so they'd rented a two-room cabin in the center of a field about four blocks from the yards, talked the lady who owned it into taking her rent at the end of the month. As Jimmy had argued, if they were going into the mind-reading and crystal gazing business, they had to have a shack and fix it up to entertain customers.

"If we was only a little better known around here," Jimmy mused as they washed the dishes. "If we just had a little publicity, it'd make it easier to work up interest. Now you take them actors; they wouldn't ever get nowhere without a press agent."

"I got a hunch we're gonna get known all right," Rick returned.

They became known, the next day. It was through one of their normal habits when providing themselves with

food. This they usually sought to do at little or no cost. That night at six they "shined," which means they reported at the yard office to await the night slave-driver's call. Rick caught the east lead engine. Jimmy was assigned to the engine that switched the shop track. At midnight they met over by the scale house to nibble their sandwiches.

"String of empties just come up from the city yards," Rick informed. "We kicked it in track five. I took a peek an' we can rake up maybe a bushel potatoes outta three or four of them cars."

"I got a gunnysack hid in my locker," replied Jimmy. "Meet you when we get off an' we'll get us some spuds. Keep your eye open for one of them melon cars, too. We used to get a nice melon now an' then in Pocatello."

"Sure will," said Rick.

At six o'clock in the morning, when the crews changed—this was in those twelve-hour days—Rick met Jimmy, who'd sneaked his sack out of the crew room and they ambled down in track five to scrape the potatoes out of the corners which the down town unloaders had left.

Rick got in the first car while Jimmy stood at the door with his bag. Rick scooped up a dozen or more choice potatoes and a number not so choice, brought them to Jimmy, dropped them in the sack. They worked the second and third car, and were in the midst of operations in the fourth when Rick was startled out of his shoes.

"HEY, you!" he heard a gruff voice snarl. "What you got there? Come on! Drop that bag!"

"Drop hell!" Rick heard Jimmy snort. "On your way! On your way!"

Rick tiptoed to the door to see a big hulk of a man looming over Jimmy. It was Snell, the yard sleuth.

"Not so fast!" Rick saw Snell's hand go toward the bulge under his coat at his hip. "Drop that bag."

Rick saw a blackjack come into view, saw Jimmy's mouth gape as Snell made a pass as if to reach for the sack. But Jimmy was too quick.

"Stealin', huh?" Snell blazed. "You're gonna come right along with me, or you're gonna—"

Again Snell made a dive for Jimmy, blackjack raised. Yard bulls were tough eggs in those days. They'd knock a man cold without blinking. Ruthless, most of them ex-thugs and gunmen. The boomer knew the breed too well.

Rick's hundred and eighty pounds smeared the bull from the air. The sleuth went down in a heap, his blackjack skidding through the cinders. Jimmy stood back to give Rick full sway, which was all Rick wanted. Snell probably had never seen anything so fast in all his life. In two minutes he was battered, beaten down, and relieved of his gun.

"Gwan, get outa here," Rick belted as Snell rolled over. "Hot-foot it! We ain't stealin' nothin' an' never have. You oughta have sense enough to let two innocent switchmen alone."

Snell beat it, ungracefully, perhaps, but the scowl and the muttering weren't lost on the victor.

"My mind-readin' instincts says we better beat it," Rick said. "That guy'll be back here with his partner. Then we'll have to kill a coupla dicks."

"Sure hate to miss gettin' all them spuds," mumbled Jimmy.

At nine o'clock the two boomers were rudely awakened from sound slumber. Snell was at the door with armed and uniformed officers of the

law. Rick, answering the knock, gazed stupidly for a second before the import of the visit dawned on him. The officers walked in with a warrant. Then, after Rick and Jimmy got dressed, they were escorted to the patrol wagon and treated to a free ride to city court.

The magistrate would take up their case in the proper order. Rick and Jimmy were taken into a little coop off the sergeant's room, where they were searched and relieved of their switch keys, some small change and their knives. They couldn't be admitted to bail until the judge fixed the amount, and they didn't have any money anyway. Rick argued with the keeper to allow him to use the telephone. The keeper was white, so Rick called the city yards and told the yardmaster what had happened.

"I wanna have your mudhop here to tell these birds that them cars was empty," said Rick.

"Do my damndest," said the city slave driver.

Rick then called Belmont yard, explained the situation, and got a promise of coöperation from that source.

Accordingly, at noon, when the case was called, it didn't take Rick and Jimmy long to prove that it was impossible for anybody to steal things from empty boxcars. The yard clerks testified that the cars were duly unloaded.

The judge had a laugh or two, and so did the court room. The thieving charge was thrown out. The assault and battery was adjudged justifiable self-defense. Snell stuttered and sputtered and the judge gave him a thorough calling down for cluttering up the court with such thin cheese. Rick and Jimmy, their personal property duly restored, were on the sidewalk a few minutes later giving Snell

the horse laugh as he came down the steps.

"You sure as hell can bet he'll be layin' for us," ventured Rick.

"You tell 'em, bo," said Jimmy.

THE case gave them the publicity Jimmy felt they needed to get along with the mind-reading plans. They just had to get going. By noon the next day every yard in the terminal knew about them and their court adventure. To say nothing of General Yardman Condon, who had them before him personally—as a matter of formality, he said.

Condon, innocently, also gave them a helping hand toward a more successful crystal gazing career. When they arrived at his office they had to wait. Rick saw Jimmy show undue interest in the attractive young lady who presided over Condon's outer office. He also saw that the girl was not a bit backward about encouraging his six-foot pal. Jimmy worked up a conversation. Then Condon pressed a buzzer.

The mind-reading started at four o'clock on the following afternoon. In fact it took the mind-reading switchman by surprise as he stood in front of the yard office on the east lead with Jimmy. A shot off the St. Louis division had just pulled down the main line to back into track eight. Attention was drawn to it because of a badly smoking hot box on the caboose. The gang was commenting on what that hogger must have been doing in the line of speed to make the crummie smoke up that way. Then Jimmy nudged Rick.

"Watch them cars backin' in," whispered Jimmy. "Get the numbers."

Rick watched while Jimmy remarked to a pair of switchmen about Rick's mind-reading ability. Jimmy stressed

the fact that while it was impossible for any of them to know what cars were in the train just backing in, Rick could call 'em off in order.

"I bet you soon's that engine clears the lead he can tell you every number an' 'nitial," Jimmy said.

"Aw, hell," grunted the switchman.

"Betcha five spot," Jimmy insisted.

"You're on," said another switchman. The first man also laid down five. Jimmy had to dig up all his small change to cover. Then Jimmy, for show, explained to Rick what was going on. Rick blinked, as if surprised.

"Why, I ain't got my crystal," Rick said.

"Hell," snorted Jimmy. "You can use your psychic powers."

"Naw. I better not. Too much strain," argued Rick.

But Rick gave in after a switchman had gone to get the waybills from the yard clerk. Another got a switch list on which to mark down the numbers as Rick called them. Rick then launched forth on his first public exhibition, to the sheer amazement of the gathering. The switchman who took down the numbers compared them with the waybills, and they checked.

"Sure is right," said the switchman.

"What the hell!" bawled the other. "How's he do it?"

The memory trick with, and without, the crystal got under way with a bang. From the slave-driver on down to the mudhops, the hands at Belmont wrote lists, put up money, and lost. Once in awhile Rick would slip intentionally, then blame it on the elements. He didn't know what elements he referred to, but it sounded psychic, so he let it go at that.

While Snell had steered clear of them at first, he, too, finally got in on

the betting. Despite the fact he was thrown for a loss every time, he continually came back for more. Rick knew the sleuth was out for revenge, and cleaning Rick's pot would be some consolation.

"Aw, it's crooked," Snell would grumble. "Worse'n a stacked deck."

Rick realized, and so did Jimmy, that the memory trick couldn't last forever. There was a hint now and then that one or another of the men would like to have a real reading—would like to hear past, present and future. Rick considered it risky business. Jimmy said he'd work it out.

He did. He came to Rick at the shack at seven one evening with a wide grin of satisfaction on his round face.

"Well, I finally made that dame in Condon's office," Jimmy announced. "An' I got just what I wanted. I got information."

"You got a weak brain," growled Rick, who didn't believe in mixing up with girls.

"Naw, look," demanded Jimmy. He laid on the table a flock of typewritten notes. "Personal records on a lot of these here snakes. We're gonna tell 'em past, present an' future from now on."

The first victim was a meek little man who'd been on the east lead engine for five years. A quiet chap who didn't seem to fit into a boomer yard. Jimmy snared him into finding out something about himself. Rick was tipped off, and the stage was set.

Rick, gazing into the crystal, astounded the man by telling him his birth date, the number of years he'd worked on the Bangor and Maine, his marriage, his children. Rick knew the present, so he used his imagination on the future. He gave it a nice twist with

a hint of a trip, sudden money and a change for the better in his work. The switchman left three dollars on the table and walked forth into the night to do a lot of advertising for the box car seer.

Two weeks followed during which, between a day of switching now and then, Jimmy was considerably taxed to get new information, and Rick had to spend several hours of the evenings with gaping, wide-eyed hard-handed boomer switchmen leaning tensely over him while he spilled past, present and future. Out in the yards, on his working days, Rick sensed the feeling of indifference shown him by those with whom he worked. Switchmen would come to him and ask him in confidence about girls and money, and a host of other things. Things were going grandly. They had money salted away in a sack beneath the kitchen floor boards. This mind-reading, Rick came to admit, was better than straight railroad-ing any day.

Then along came Jimmy one bright morning with startling information.

"Snell's gonna make you read his mind," said Jimmy.

"Snell! The bull!" Rick was staggered. "Hell's bells! Where'll we get anything on him?"

"I ain't got no idea," said Jimmy frowning. "But I'll try. Only you keep shy of that guy if you see him comin'. I gotta have a coupla days."

Rick didn't learn until long afterward just how Jimmy dug up the "dirt" on the gumshoe. Rick knew Jimmy was hard at it, because he was away from the shack two nights in a row; didn't even show up at the crew room for assignment. Rick dodged Snell, as ordered, until Jimmy came home. He had bloodshot eyes and a yearning for bed, but he had the dope.

Jimmy took his rest, gave Rick the information, then fixed it with a yard clerk to start agitating Snell. The sleuth swallowed it hook, line and sinker.

It was the night of pay day. A dozen hands were gathered in the glow of the oil lamp on the table. Rick was at his crystal, Jimmy smoking in a corner. Snell walked in, followed by the yard clerk.

"Well, wise guy," Snell snarled. "I been hearin' what you're doin' to these boys, an' how you been takin' money off 'em with this here mind-readin'."

"An' I suppose you want me to read your mind?" taunted Rick. "Well, if you got the price, you're welcome. Three bucks an' I give you past, present an' future."

"Three buck, hell!" growled Snell. "I got twenty-five bucks that says you're a damn faker. You can't tell me nothin'."

"Like hell I can't," Rick retorted. "Let's see your dough."

Snell laid two tens and a five on the cloth defiantly.

"All right," he bawled. "Shoot!"

Rick noted the evil gleam in the big sleuth's eyes, as he got the man to sit down.

"Now, you gotta compose yourself," said Rick more gently. "That's it."

"Cut out that guff," snarled Snell. "Get down to business."

RICK was silent for a moment, while he trained his eyes on the crystal.

"Hmm," grunted the mind-reader, after a space. "You want these boys to hear?"

"You ain't gonna tell me nothin' they can't hear," retorted Snell.

"Concentrate," Rick ordered. He

made a couple of passes over the crystal, sat perfectly quiet. Silence fell over the gathering. Snell was breathing loudly. Rick was playing psychology, even if he didn't know it. He was trying to work up a certain tenseness and he succeeded remarkably. Then suddenly he looked up to see Snell staring at the crystal with narrowed eyes. The sleuth's jaw was set and his fist clenched.

"Think, now," Rick's voice sounded far off, "about what's closest to you." Another pause. The tension increased, breathing became more audible. The eyes of the entire group were trained on the boomer switchman who leaned over the glass ball.

"I see here," Rick began faintly, as if under a great strain, "that you got a wife. She—she's—I see here she ain't either one of two women. One's name's Elsie. The other one's Hattie. This Elsie an' Hattie. You been close to 'em. Intimate. In fact you been chasin'—"

Rick broke off, shot a quick look at Snell, saw his eyes bulging, his teeth clenched.

"You an' this Hattie," Rick continued in a slow, faint tone, "night before last, was sittin' in a speakeasy down on Illinois Street, an'—"

"Aw, go to hell," shouted the sleuth, as he pushed over half a dozen men in making his whirling exit. "You damn framers!"

He slammed his way out, but he left his twenty-five dollars behind.

Rick and Jimmy had just counted the pot. It was shortly after eleven the next morning. They had two hundred dollars to the good. Jimmy was gloating over it, but Rick had a premonition of trouble. The still, small voice inside him said it was too good to be true—to last any longer.

The premonition became stronger when the call boy from the yard office sauntered up and banged on the door sill. The yardmaster wanted to see Rick and Jimmy right away. Important, the call boy hinted. They got their hats and sauntered down to the office.

"Maybe you're gonna read his mind," grinned Jimmy.

"Yeh, and maybe we're gonna get fired," Rick growled.

The day slave-driver was a white guy all the way through. He was hard-boiled, but he was human. He could cuss a man out for a bonehead play until he got red in the face, then borrow a chew from his victim in the next breath. He was sitting at his battered desk when Rick and Jimmy entered.

"I guess you boys don't need to ask me what's up," he said, looking from one to the other. "Willets, here, if his mind's a workin' good this mornin', knows why I had to send for you."

"I got a good idea," Rick replied, "but I ain't said nothin' to Jimmy."

"Well, just to be sure you ain't wrong," the yardmaster explained, "an' to do my duty right, I gotta tell you that Condon desires your presence at his office in the mornin' at ten. They's gonna be a investigation."

"Investigation!" It was Jimmy who blinked. Rick saw him stagger.

"Yeh," said the yardmaster. "Condon called me up a while ago an' said to round you two up before they was any more mind-readin' done."

"What's eatin' him?" Jimmy was puzzled.

"Why, he wants his mind read," replied the slave-driver with a twinkle. "Seems like he heard tell about you, boys an' he's gonna make a party of it. He's gonna have a list of a hundred cars that Willets has got to call off

for him, an' it's gonna be a list that you an' Willetts ain't seen an' ain't never gonna see."

"He say that?" A sickly feeling gripped Rick's middle.

"He sure did," said the yardmaster. "An' he also said you boys was outta service till he seen you. You don't need to shine to-night."

JIMMY and Rick crossed the tracks and sat on a bench by the crossing watchman's shanty.

"Guess we better resign," mumbled Rick. "We ain't married to this railroad."

"We ain't gonna quit under fire, neither," Jimmy replied stoutly. "Nawsir. They's a way outta this. I gotta figger."

"It don't take no mind readin' for me to figger. I read that dick's mind too well," mused Rick. "We better go pack up."

Jimmy said that he was going to town instead. Rick went to the shack to await developments.

The mind-reading switchman was frying spuds and boiling coffee when Jimmy got back. One glance told Rick that Jimmy had a new plan.

"Well, it's all set," said Jimmy. "You ain't got nothin' to worry about."

"No? I suppose you went down, an' Condon gave you a copy of the list."

"He didn't tell me, pard," replied Jimmy, "but his girl did."

"Yeh?" Rick's brows lifted.

Jimmy then explained that he had got word to the girl, and the girl had readily told him about the plan that Condon had outlined. Condon, in fact, had left it up to the young woman to find a list of a hundred cars.

"She said for me to call her on the phone at five, an' maybe she could help

me," Jimmy went on. "I did, an' she give a train number that come in off the St. Louis division on June the eighth. It was a drag with a hundred rattlers in it outside the clown wagon. I tore out the office copy at the yards for you to memorize."

Rick took the carbon copy of the list suspiciously.

"All you gotta do is get it under your skull, Rick."

"All I gotta do is leave town," said Rick. "We been here too long."

But Jimmy persuaded, and Rick spent the entire evening studying the long list of figures and initials. By midnight Jimmy was putting him through the paces, holding the list and making Rick repeat it. Rick stuttered over it, missed time and again. Jimmy stuck with him until he was satisfied Rick had it. Then the mind reader went to bed, only to toss and wrestle with box cars in a restless, broken slumber.

It was probably the strangest investigation ever held in a division official's office. Condon, red-necked, with pudgy fingers folded prayer wise over his middle bulge, stared about him with eyes like a fish long out of water. His features were heavy and expressionless.

Rick mopped perspiration from his brow. His gaze shifted from Jimmy to Condon, then to Snell. Snell's presence was not unexpected. There was an evil, gloating smile on the bull's face. The girl, Condon's secretary, sat at the end of the table. She looked pale and drawn, which puzzled Rick. He wondered if Jimmy noticed her.

The Belmont yardmaster was taking a good curtain lecture about allowing betting to go on openly in the crew room. Condon was surely raising hell. His voice was thin, harsh. The slave

driver was taking the dose without flinching. He was an old-timer, and knew it wouldn't do any good to alibi himself.

After a time Condon stopped and the yardmaster gave a short, persistent declaration of innocence. Rick had to speak up.

"It's like he says," ventured Rick. "It ain't his fault. He didn't know nothin' about our—"

"When I'm ready for *you*, I'll tell you to talk. Shut up!" Condon barked the words at the boomer, who rose angrily to his feet, opened his mouth to retort, then thought better of it and sat down again. Condon finally finished on the yardmaster. Then he turned.

"Now, to look at a real mind reader," Condon said to Rick, and the boomer thought there was a nasty inflection in his voice. "I always wanted to see what one looked like. You are a mind reader?"

"Yeh—yeh—yessir," stuttered Rick, reddening. "I—I do clairvoyance."

He realized the words sounded flat, but he could do nothing about it. For the first time in his life he felt utterly foolish, and when a boomer switchman feels that way, things have come to a pretty bad pass.

"He's been under a strain lately," ventured Jimmy. "I thought—"

CONDON evidently didn't give a hoot what Jimmy thought.

"Shut up until I call on you to talk," snapped Condon. "Now, Willetts, I'm going to give you a chance to prove your ability. I'm not going to ask you to read my mind. You're going to tell me, instead, the initials and numbers of a hundred cars I have on a list here. It's on such performances, I understand, that you and Tripp have

been trimming the men you work with."

"Excuse me, Mr. Condon." Jimmy was on his feet. "We don't trim nobody. When you go to a show you pay good jack to see a performance. That's what happens when Rick performs his trick. Only we give a chance that if he don't do it, the man gets his money back. You got Rick here to perform. I got money that says he can do what you want him to right now. You can ball us out, but you oughtn't to say anything about trimmin'."

"So you got money to back up Willetts." Condon smiled.

"I got money," Jimmy shot back and produced the roll. Rick gulped. That was the works. Two months of accumulated profits. Then Rick saw the girl half rise from her chair, only to slump back again. Jimmy was counting off the bills. "Two hundred an' ten bucks."

Condon drummed the table. His fishy eyes shot to Rick, then to Jimmy. He called Snell to his side.

"You made the complaints against these men," said Condon. "Take a copy of this list here and give Tripp a copy. Tripp! Move your chair to this end of the table. Clear away from Willetts." Jimmy moved.

"Now I'll tell you what I'm going to do," continued Condon. "I'm going to cover that money. Miss Carter"—he turned to the girl—"you hold the stakes." From his pocket he took a roll, counted it out. "Take this money outside. If these men lose, you're to apply it to the hospital fund for the line's Veterans' Association."

Rick saw the girl's hand tremble as she took the money. She gave Jimmy a glance as she passed to the door. Rick wished he had a chance to wipe that foolish grin off Jimmy's mug.

Never had he felt less sure of himself. His free and easy manner had all but left him.

Snell gave Jimmy a copy of the list, kept one for himself.

"Ready, Willetts?" piped Condon. His swivel chair creaked as he leaned back.

"All set," Rick replied half-heartedly. From his coat pocket he brought forth his crystal, placed it in front of him. He wanted to throw it at Condon and walk out. Instead he rubbed it off with his handkerchief and stared at it.

"All right," said Condon abruptly. "What's the eighty-fifth car?"

Rick batted his eyes. Hell of a place to start in a list of a hundred. He paused overlong.

"Wait a minute," Condon broke the pause. "Maybe that's a little tough. Tell me the tenth."

"Pennsylvania 891798," Rick shot back, closing his eyes and holding a mental picture of the train list he'd studied.

"Sure?" asked Condon.

"Sure," responded Rick.

"Gimme the sixteenth," said Condon.

Rick gave it to him. He called off ten more without the slightest hesitation. He was getting into the swing of it, feeling surer of himself when his eye caught Jimmy's. He saw Jimmy's bronzed face was almost pale. Jimmy was trying to signal to him. Snell was smiling a grim, evil smile.

"Well," said Condon with an air of finality, "he's giving me car numbers, all right, but they're not the ones on my list."

Rick's heart gave a tremendous bound, slapped a tonsil out of place. He swallowed hard.

"Not here on mine, either," boomed Snell.

Jimmy, apparently, was too sick to say anything. He tossed his copy to the table.

"You men may go," said Condon shortly. "And, Willetts!" Rick started. "Try your crystal and see if it'll tell you some nice railroad that desires the services of you two. I'll give you an order for your time."

Somehow the two boomers got through the door to the outer office where the girl was sitting at her desk.

"Wait for me outside," Jimmy said to Rick. "I wanna talk to this little lady."

Rick went outside and waited.

IT was in the passing track at Shelbyville that two boomer switchmen sat glumly on the bottom of an empty gondola, thirty cars deep in a south-bound drag. Rick Willetts was looking at a crystal ball cupped in the palms of his horny hands.

"An' you think that jane in Condon's office told the truth," Rick was saying, "when she said Snell overheard her givin' you that train list?"

"Yeah, bo," Jimmy replied emphatically. "He heard her tip me off, then got the old man to let him make up a list outa his head. Hell, you seen her tryin' to gimme a sign. She said Snell promised her he wouldn't tell the old man she was double crossin' him. An' me—hell, I didn't see the difference when I looked at the list. I hadn't memorized it like you."

"Jimmy," said Rick weightily as he stood up, "I still say we gotta stick to straight railroadin'."

"Sure do," agreed Jimmy as Rick hurled the crystal into an adjoining pasture.



*He stood tensely gripping the rock, a warning
finger at his lips*

Princess of the Atom

Sequel to "The Girl in the Golden Atom"

*From one weird experience to another even more amazing goes Frank Ferrule,
venturer into the microscopic world of the atom*

By RAY CUMMINGS

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

FRANK FERRULE, who is telling the story, and his brother Drake had a foster sister, Dianne, whom their father had found as a baby on Bird's Nest Island near their Maine home. She disappears, but returns shortly after several fifty-foot giants had terrorized the world.

Dianne is the princess of a tiny world hidden in an atom on the island. The scientists of that atom-world have a space-flying vehicle, and a drug which they can take to make them expand into largeness, or diminish again.

Togaro, a ruthless adventurer, has been trying to usurp power in the atom-world, and it was to put Dianne out of his reach that the scientists had first made her large, human-size. But now Togaro has discovered the drug, and has built himself a vehicle. He is trying to get the inhabitants to follow him into our world and conquer it.

Dianne, Drake and Frank Ferrule, Dianne's girl companion Ahlma, and a loyal lieutenant Alt, go into the atom-world which the Ferrules have dug up, taken to their home, and placed under

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guard. But Togaro hides himself—as a tiny creature—on Frank, and stows away aboard the space-flying vehicle on the last stage of the journey into smallness, then as it is about to land in the atom, he takes the expansion-drug, seizes Dianne, and warns Frank, Drake, Ahlma and Alt that he will kill her before they can shoot him, unless they set him safely aground.

Frank hides in smallness, and climbs up Togaro's monstrous figure. They land, and Togaro ruthlessly takes more of the drug, bursting out of the ship, and running away with Dianne. The tiny Frank clings to his leather belt as Togaro runs to the hiding-place of his own space-ship, where the giant dwindles to infinitesimal size. Frank keeps still smaller, and the three board the ship, which begins growing in size.

A hundred of Togaro's men spring up in all parts of the atom-world of Mita, in giant size, with ten thousand tiny followers clinging to them; and they board the ship. Togaro, vengeful toward the world of Mita, has his ship expand till it is far larger than the world it rests on; then, dragging it by gravitation behind him, he snaps it off by sudden repulsion.

As Drake, left on Mita with millions of others, struggles feverishly to repair his wrecked space-ship, the atom-world starts falling, slowly, then with increasing speed toward its blazing sun!

CHAPTER XXIV (*Continued*).

THE END OF A WORLD.

IN the chaos of those final hours Drake must have played a leading and a masterful part. He does not tell it so, but I think it is true. Authority—the routine of any official activity—was wholly gone. Of them all, it

was Drake who held most to his wits, who gave orders and enforced obedience.

The time was very short. There was an hour—or even less—while the red dawn faded into full light of day. The monstrous hull of the Togaro ship projected like a black roof over all the scene. The shadow of it lay black upon the city, the palace and lake. It grew until up there in the sky nothing else could be seen.

Then it lifted. It moved up a few miles. It hovered up there. From one horizon to the other it loomed, a solid dark shape like a leaden cloud-bank. Its great pontoons were visible. The rectangles of floor windows showed in its bulging hull.

An expanding dark cloud. It soon was spread so wide that all across the sky was only one small section of its length—one pontoon, one window.

But during that hour Drake was accomplishing things in all the turmoil of people almost stricken of reason by terror. The space-ship was ready at last. The repairs fortunately had been almost finished before the panic began.

Messengers were sent into the burning city with orders to herd the crowd to the landing field. Local ships were sent to other cities. Some got started, some did not. But a few, at the very last, came back loaded with refugees.

The young men of that army which Drake had expected to lead into smallness against Togaro, were now most useful of all. They understood the drugs and could be trusted with them. In the lower room of the palace Drake stood with the main supply of drugs. He dealt them out to this little army. A hundred or more. They stood, white-faced and silent; but alert, eager to obey.

"Alt, tell them—" Drake cursed

his inability to speak with any fluency this native language. But Alt, always at his elbow, was swift to interpret. "Alt, tell these ten to get large, very large, and run to the water city."

Another ten, somewhere else; and others. In a size gigantic, they could circle this little globe on foot in an hour or so. They were to pick up as many of the people as possible and bring them back.

The lower room of the palace was dark now. The brief day was past. Night had come. Stars, and the moon. But the moon had only shown for a moment. The black cloud, the shape of the Togaro vehicle, was up there among the stars. The moon had swung crazily and was gone.

Into the palace windows came the mingled sounds of the night of chaos: screams, the roaring of futile orders in the garden, where a crowd was surging over the trampled neglected bodies. Darkness out there, painted by the lurid glare from the burning city.

Drake dispatched his men. They turned out into the frantic night, fought their way for space in the milling throngs, and took their drug. Soon they were rising as giants, moving cautiously to the open country, then running.

DRAKE had been to the landing field several times. The vehicle was ready. It lay gigantic, spreading all across the field. Thousands of refugees were in it. Others were momentarily arriving. Ten thousand now, the officials there told Drake. A thousand, hurt in the throngs or crushed by the passing of Togaro's giants, had also been carried here.

Drake sent the other men to search the city—to bring back from the littered streets any who seemed still alive.

From the palace gardens and the nearest streets, the police were spurred to carry in the maimed.

A thousand people arrived while Drake stood there on the field. A local ship came down and landed with another thousand. Two of his men, gigantic, came dashing up with another thousand clinging to them whom they had collected in the near-by rural sections. Men and women, and children huddled in their parents' arms. Some had bundles of clothes, which, for all this clinging to the back of a giant in the last hours of the end of a world, they still were reluctant to abandon. Families, trudging aimlessly along country roads in the night or driving carts piled with household treasures, had been seized by these friendly giants and brought to the vehicle.

Drake saw a white-faced little girl being lifted from a giant's neck. She was clutching a doll. She stood, admonishing it not to be frightened.

A lump was in Drake's throat. These few thousands of people, arriving here to what might or might not be ultimate safety—but there were ten million people here on this doomed little world!

Drake wondered how long he dared hold the vehicle here. The night itself was wildly crazy. He saw the moon vanish with a lunge. The stars were abnormally swaying. A wind was springing up from the lake, a violent, aimless wind. The water lashed against the shore.

The arriving giants reported storms in the other hemisphere. The sea had mounted and submerged many of the islands.

Then the next dawn came. The sun swung crazily up. Swiftly, abnormally mounting to the zenith. And there, against all reason of nature, it seemed to hang motionless; for an hour per-

haps. Then it dropped visually sideways, and came again, swaying like a pendulum.

The Togaro vehicle showed only occasionally now as a distant blur among the stars. Mita was wildly lurching. This was not day and night. A chaos!

Drake knew it was near the end. The sun presently hung motionless. It was growing hotter. Its heat and fiercely intensified light beat down. Soon they would be intolerable.

"A few hours more, Alt. That's all we can stay here."

Drake was horribly worried over Ahlma. She had pleaded:

"I am experienced with the drug. You must let me go, Drake. Let me get large—I will bring some of them back to safety—"

In his harassed activity he had yielded, had stood watching her huge robed figure running off into the night. She had not yet returned. A hundred times he had felt that he must drop everything and go after her. But he could not be spared; nor could he spare Alt.

Twice Drake had checked the embarking multitude and had ordered the vehicle to grow larger. It lay now across the field and over half a dozen near-by city streets. They had been cleared of people, and the growing vehicle had crushed the houses there into a wreckage of masonry.

THE end was near. The sun was twice its normal size. The glaring heat was horrible. Jain, with other officials, were demanding the start.

"No! Not yet!" But Drake knew that not for very long could he force his way.

A few giants were still straggling in; Drake and Alt and a hundred other leaders were standing in a giant size

at the vehicle doorway. The glare of sunlight was blinding. The lake was roaring with a hot, sulphurous wind plucking at it, lashing it.

But Ahlma had not come. Then off over the toy landscape, Drake saw the blur of her robe. Her head and shoulders mounted above the horizon. She came running with great leaps. As she arrived Drake saw the small figures upon her. Women and children, almost all of them.

"Ahlma!" He was her own size. He touched her; words would not come. But he knew that the safety of all these multitudes had meant less to him than the life of this one girl.

"Ahlma, go in. They'll unload them inside— There—the doorway—"

"Yes, Drake. How many are here?"

"We think about a hundred and ten thousand."

"Oh!"

It was so few, out of ten million!

Ahlma went into the ship. Drake turned to Jain. "Shall we start?"

"We must!"

A toy world lay wrecked at their feet. Clouds had come suddenly down. They swirled over the land—tumbling black mist, shot with lurid green and turgid yellow. But the sun beat through them. Rain came in a downpour; but the sun beat it away and dried it up.

"Come in then, Jain."

No, there was another giant coming. He panted up with his cluster of refugees. And then another came.

They could wait no longer. There was a moment when no arriving giants were in sight. Ten million people on this doomed planet—only a few over a hundred thousand were here to depart. But the sun was too hot. The scene was strewn with people who had fallen in the heat. Drake was suddenly staggering. Jain pulled at him, and the

door closed after them. From a stricken toy world, the vehicle struggled away.

THE interior of the ship was a blur of murmuring sounds. A hundred or so giants, like Drake, to whom the ship was a thing a few hundred feet long; and a hundred and ten thousand people, small as ants, swarming it everywhere.

Drake stood at a window. He thinks he must have stood there for hours. The surface of Mita dropped away as the ship sped off into space. The stars showed, celestial space.

The Togaro vehicle was gone. Drake saw Mita through his window. A little ball. The sun lighted it upon one side, so that it showed as a reddish half moon, with the dark portion dimly visible.

Drake's ship was expanding. But after an hour or so its size-changing mechanism was shut off. It hovered—the Mitans in control of it lingering with fascinated gaze to witness the destruction of their world.

It took perhaps a few hours more. Mita was falling. The yellow-red ball of sun hung off there in the black field of space beneath Drake's window. Mita seemed above, falling slowly. The movement was hardly visible at first. But it accelerated. The two bodies visibly drawing together.

Then Mita was rushing. Drake thinks he remembers seeing a tail streaming out behind it. A tail, like a comet, as though by its fall it were turning incandescent and leaving a stream of glowing star-dust. Or perhaps with its rapid fall, its atmosphere was leaving it—dust-laden air streaming off into space where the dust caught the sunlight and glowed. There is no one to say.

A fall of millions of miles. It was that far, to Mita. I can fancy, in those last hours, the blazing heat withering everything upon the planet's surface. Its ten million inhabitants—save those few Drake had helped to rescue—I can think that long before the end, they were dead; shriveled, fallen in the heat. Smothered, choked by the gases which must have polluted what little atmosphere was left.

Drake saw the end. The planet plunged. Fell like a plummet at the last and struck the blazing surface of its sun. There was a flash: a leaping, extra spurt of flame for just a moment in the sun's corona.

Then the sun blazed alone. What had been Mita was fused and gone. Non-existent!

From the window Drake turned shudderingly away. He had seen the end of a world.

CHAPTER XXV.

IN THE CAMP FIRE LIGHT.

THERE were some forty thousand people on the Togarite ship, adventuring out upon the conquest of the earth. A few hundred men, who were the Togarite leaders. I think there were perhaps six or eight hundred of these in all. They were experienced with the drugs, and constituted Togaro's active army.

Not very many for the conquest of all the nations of our earth. Yet enough! I realized it as I contemplated what they could do. Togaro was planning carefully. There were thousands of other men on this ship—Mitans who had joined his cause. He could easily have trained them. But he was wise enough to realize that the diabolical power of the drugs needed always to

be kept under his close control. He could handle his six or eight hundred trusted men; a larger army might have been awkward.

There were several hundred giants aboard the ship now. The rest of the horde was in a tiny size. They had no drugs. They were men—but there were women and children also. I could imagine that all the renegades of Togaro's world were assembled here, eager with the lust of conquest of an earth they had never seen.

They swarmed the vehicle now. They were as small as I. Fortunately none came to this cabin where Dianne was closely watched, and where I was lurking. If they had come, being so small, they would doubtless have discovered me.

I did not dare leave the cabin; nor did I find, during all the voyage which lasted what seemed twenty-four hours perhaps, an opportunity of again communicating with Dianne.

I need not detail this outward voyage. I saw many strange things through that cabin window. The reverse of the inward trip. Diminishing, shrinking space. The stars becoming so small that they flared about us like a rain of sparks.

Great voids of distance, always shrinking. Then at last, the gray glowing molecules. Whirling and tumbling. A few at first, very far away. Then many, very close. Then great clouds of them, rolling and swirling. Dark. But sometimes shimmering. And always shrinking—congealing into solidity.

The transitions from one condition to another—from celestial space to solid, rocky abyss—were never apparent, and impossible of close description. I was watching eagerly for solidity. I did not see it come—I saw

only that at last it was there—out there in the void. A vague, distant rocky wall. It dropped downward, as though we were mounting. Barren cliffs gigantic, but dwindling. Closing in upon us.

Activity became apparent throughout the ship as we neared the voyage end. Dianne, after a few hours, had been given into the charge of several giant women. She had been taken away to another cabin. A wild thought came to me that I should cling to her robe. But the thing had come suddenly, unexpectedly. I was across the cabin. I could not reach her; the chances of discovery would have been too great. I lay in a recess niche of the bottom of the wall, and watched her go.

Later I found upon the floor some crumbs of food which she had dropped for me. They were, to my size, great chunks of a baked dough, like bread. I ate part of them. My hunger was appeased, but I suffered from thirst.

TOGARRO used this cabin now for consultation with some of his men. I lay, carefully hidden. The room was brighter than before, and the guard was constantly alert. Togaro sat at a table with a few of his men around him.

They talked in their native language; I could not understand a word of it. He seemed to be planning his campaign. He had lived in our world for a year. He doubtless knew a good deal about it. He spread upon the table now what seemed to be maps.

My mind was busy with my own plans, but they were in truth, vague enough. I must get Dianne away from Togaro—escape with her. With the supply of drugs which I had, I felt sure that Dianne and I could get out of

smallness faster than this expedition of Togaro's. This multitude of people would of necessity be slow in traveling.

It occurred to me, as it had many times before, to wonder how Togaro planned to get out of the rock fragment when he knew that father had it so carefully guarded. Whatever his plans, he seemed confident of them. That they would involve clever trickery, and a reckless daring, I had no doubt. By some daring means he hoped to take father by surprise.

An utter recklessness seemed characteristic of Togaro. He was ready to take every wild chance, yet it was tempered always with careful planning. I recalled how he had got past father and Foley—ridden me into smallness. And how, upon our ship, he had stolen Dianne from under our eyes.

The voyage came to an end. I stayed hidden. To have moved seemed to mean instant discovery. And I had not seen Dianne again.

The ship landed in the depths of a stunted forest. Dark, shadowed verdure, with a dim effulgence of light upon far distant mountain ranges. The disembarkation took an hour or more. I could hear the people marching out of the ship, clustering in the forest, setting up their first encampment with the giants helping them. There seemed no need for secrecy. Fires began springing up. Portable houses of animal skins, like tents, were erected. Meals were prepared. A myriad duties necessary to the welfare of forty thousand people were under way.

I climbed through the wire-woven side hull of the ship, and reached the ground safely. I stood beside a tree. The giant ship had mangled a great spread of the forest. I found that I

had got out none too soon. The ship began shrinking. Its crew was taking it into a smaller size, to hide it—or abandon it somewhere—and then themselves return to rejoin the encampment. It dwindled, and presently was gone. The mashed forest trees lay like broken jackstraws where it had been.

I stood for perhaps an hour there in the darkness, getting my bearings upon these new conditions. I was about normal in size to this forest; this tree was stunted, but its limbs arched out over me for what seemed twenty or thirty feet.

I found, too, that these thousands of people encamped here over several miles of forest territory, were all about my size. And the giants now began dwindling. Evidently they found it dangerous to move about—difficult to avoid trampling the tiny multitude. They dwindled to the smaller stature.

It was presently almost a normal earthly scene. A forest encampment by night. Camp fires of burning brush; cone-shaped tents; like wigwams; families clustered over their outdoor meal; the Togarite leaders giving orders, directing the activity.

I DID not see Togaro himself. Nor Dianne. I would have to move about and locate her. I pondered changing size. It did not seem advisable. With a smaller stature I could not, in days, tramp about this camp and find Dianne. Or if now I got larger, I would be instantly conspicuous. I was conspicuous enough already. My garments were different from all these Mitans—my knitted bathing suit marked me for a stranger. My whole aspect—my language—differed.

I made a start. I moved cautiously

off through the trees. The lights from the fires were circles of red and yellow. I kept out of them, in the recessed shadows. Somewhere, at one of these fires, Dianne must be sitting. I wondered if I could locate Togaro; he might have Dianne with him.

Occasionally figures passed near me. I was seen no doubt, but only dimly. Once I almost bumped into a man who was gathering brushwood. A woman and a child came up and took it from him. I mumbled something and ducked away.

The incident gave me an idea. The man was garbed in a jacket with puffed, flaring sleeves and a circular bottom that flared like a skirt at his knees. And he wore a cone-shaped hat, broad-brimmed. It was a costume distinctive, and characteristic of most of these men. If I could get possession of such a jacket and hat, they would disguise me.

I wandered on, skulking the fringes of the camp like a lurking Indian in a primitive American forest.

The camp finally settled to sleep. The fires died. The Togarite men patrolled back and forth, silent shadows in the gloom.

I found my opportunity at last. A tent, where by the embers of a fire outside, a man's jacket and hat were lying. I watched my chance when no guard was near. I darted forward, seized the garments and made away.

The jacket and hat brought a sense of security. I was unarmed, but so was all the camp, it seemed. Strange expedition to conquer a world without weapons. But the drug was enough!

Yet there were weapons of a sort here. These guards carried short, heavy metal bars. I had seen one or two swords. And at the belts of the Togarites who wore the drugs there

was dangling what looked like a sling shot; a forked stick with a leather sling. Inoffensive device, it seemed to me now, an ancient Biblical weapon, fallen now in modern times of our earth to be a child's toy. I recalled afterward how I sneered now at this little weapon. Our harassed nations of earth, with all their modern war-planes, did not find this little sling shot so inoffensive!

Shrouded by the jacket, hiding my belt of drugs, with the hat brim pulled low over my eyes, I felt a measure of security. I realized that I was exhausted—that all during the outward voyage I had hardly dared relax to sleep. I found now a wooded glen of ferns, dark and secluded, with a blessed little rill of water at which I slaked my burning thirst.

Then I lay down, and in a moment was sleeping heavily.

THE sound of voices wakened me. People were passing near me, but they did not see me. Or if they did, my sleeping form caused no comment. How long I had slept I did not know. But I was again hungry. And I found that the camp was fully awake, bustling with its morning duties.

Morning? The darkness was no different from before. The camp fires were lighted again. All that day—if day it could be called—I skulked, an outcast in the encampment, stealing what food I needed. I found that my aspect, unless under too close a scrutiny, was passing unnoticed.

But I could not locate Dianne or Togaro. There were forty thousand people here in the forest. I skulked from one fire to another, but without success.

Had Dianne been taken away? Again I cursed myself for an inept

fool. I wondered how long Togaro intended to keep this encampment? Then presently I realized what was being done. I saw near by, in a clearing, a giant rising. He grew to what looked like several hundred feet, and then stopped. A gathered throng was off there, and I made my way in that direction.

The tents were struck here. A thousand people were ready to start away. The giant was giving them the drug. They marched off as they started growing, with the giant leading them—dim figures towering into the immensity of distance until presently they had vanished.

I realized now how this multitude would be taken upward into largeness. There was not a sufficient supply of the drug for them all to have it at a small size. The single Togarite captain, getting large, expanded his drugs and then fed the thousand people in his charge; at every stage of the journey he would do the same.

There were parties such as this starting now at regular intervals. I wandered on; and I found Dianne at last. It was again near the time of sleep. Ten thousand of the people had departed—but thirty thousand were still here awaiting their turn.

Dianne was seated at a camp fire, around which several women were cooking a meal. A tent stood near by—a peaked canopy of skins. It was larger than most of the others, with tasseled drapings at its doorway. Dianne's tent, where she was waited upon by these women, I did not doubt.

I stood in the shadows of a tree, just outside the circle of fire light. The light of the playing logs made Dianne's golden robe glisten; etched her sharply against the darkness behind her. She sat composed and quiet, with a regal

dignity as the women prepared to serve her. I thought, as I stood there in the darkness, that I had never seen her so beautiful.

COULD I get to her? I saw that for all her composed casual manner, she was very alert.

I stood planning. A smaller size for me alone was not practical—I had tried that before. But now, concealed under my jacket was enough of the diminishing drug for both her and me. If I could get to her unchallenged, she and I could take the drug and escape into smallness.

There were other fires within twenty feet of me—a thousand people here within the sound of a voice. Dianne and I would need a minute or two before the alarm was given.

Whatever chance I had was at once gone. Togaro appeared! In a size normal to Dianne and me, he came sauntering up to her fire and greeted her. He was broadly smiling, evidently in a high good humor. He wore a vivid outer jacket; his whole aspect—the colored sash about his hips, his tasseled leggings—was that of a cavalier in jaunty, debonair mood.

I saw that he had discarded his belt of drugs. He took off his circular hat and cast it to the ground.

The meal was ready. Togaro evidently dismissed the women; they moved back, out of my line of vision behind the tent. I heard his voice saying in English:

"You will serve us, little Dianne. Why not? A supper here together, before we start the upward trip:

I could not hear what she said, but he answered:

"Yes, to-night. When we have eaten, Dianne. I have everything organized—I am not needed here. You

and I and your serving maids will start. The next camp will be ready ahead of us—it will not be too long a journey.” He laughed. “I would not tire my little Dianne. I am good to you; can you say it that I am not?”

I stood tense. To follow them upward would be difficult. It was now or never.

Dianne moved about, serving the meal. They sat down facing each other beside the fire and began to eat. Dianne was as yet wholly unaware of my presence. I edged a little closer, slipped from one tree to another until I was behind Togaro, with Dianne facing me.

I stood now in the darkness beside the bole of a tree, just beyond the circle of fire light. I was hardly twenty feet from them. I could hear their voices. My foot touched a loose rock. I stooped and picked it up—a chunk larger than my fist. I thought that there might be no one watching the scene. I wanted to creep forward, cross the lighted area, and strike Togaro before he could make an outcry.

But Dianne must be made aware of me first, to be on her guard and ready for my rush.

I took a step forward. She would see me now, I hoped—see me as a vague, shadowy form in the gloom. I took off my hat, and got the diminishing drug quickly available. I stood tense, gripping the chunk of rock, a finger of my other hand to my lips warning her to silence. If she would see me, she must have the presence of mind not to start, or make any sign that would warn Togaro.

I watched her closely. But at first she did not chance to look my way.

“But, Togaro—”

“You cannot say but that I am very gentle with you, Dianne.”

“You make me fear you.”

“I do not! Fear is an emotion unworthy. You are a masterful woman. You made a good ruler of your people.”

“You dare to speak of them! After—after what you did to our little world.”

He frowned. “Let us forget that.”

“Forget?”

“I want only pleasant things with you, Dianne. Mita is gone—forget it. The world lies ahead of us.”

“You have made me hate you, Togaro.”

He said with a sudden rasp, “Hate me? I am gentle with you, Dianne, because it amuses me. But there is a limit; when you say you fear me, you have good reason. No woman ever fooled me yet, Dianne.”

SHE did not answer. She was staring past his shoulder, her gaze flung far off through the dark vista of this forest as though she were seeing again the doomed little planet whose people she had ruled.

I thought I saw her stiffen. She stared my way.

“Togaro—”

It made my heart leap wildly. Was she about to call his attention to my lurking figure? Did she see me, but not recognize me?

She stammered, “Togaro—you know I hate you. But hate and love are very close. I—was wondering why you put on that sash. It’s very becoming.”

She had recognized me! I could not miss it—I even fancied she had sent me a warning glance. But she looked instantly away, smiling now with a mocking allure upon Togaro.

Women are very quick-witted; nimble, agile as a flea. Beside them man’s

wits are dull, stolid as though hung with lead. There is no man who can cope with a woman bent upon deception.

Togaro said, "This sash?"

She leaned toward him. She repeated, "I hate you, Togaro." Exactly as she had said it before, yet with a tremendous difference. A side glance; a droop of her lashes; a little twist of her beautiful lips.

Though I knew it was deception, it shot a pang through me nevertheless; and it must have struck at Togaro with a surge of emotion. Whatever alertness to his surroundings he had had was gone. He put out a hand and seized her by the shoulder.

"Hate me? Why—"

She swayed toward him and was in his arms. But she struggled a little.

"Togaro, how dare you! Don't you dare—"

There is no man who can yield up a woman when she struggles like that. I thought that over his shoulder she had shot me another glance.

I darted forward. Dianne was fighting with Togaro. Playfully—but she saw me coming, and she changed. Gripped him by the face, with one of her small hands over his mouth. Then she lunged, flung herself upon him. The attack knocked him sidewise. He fell upon one arm.

For an instant she held her hand over his mouth against all his surprised effort to tear it away. In that instant I was upon them. I did not dare fling the rock.

Togaro saw me coming. With a lunge he cast off Dianne, and half rose to meet me. We went down together. He was far stronger than I; and though I landed on top of him, he rolled me over.

I was aware of Dianne plucking at

us, striving to impede Togaro as we fought.

I shouted, "Dianne—keep away."

The rock was still in my hand, but Togaro had my arm pinned. He fought silently, then he let out a bellow. The camp took it up, and the uproar surged toward us.

I was underneath him, and his hands went to my throat. But that released my arm. I struck upward with the chunk of rock. It must have hit him a glancing blow on the head. He relaxed; slumped, a dead weight upon me.

I squirmed out from under him.

"Frank, this way!"

Dianne seized me. The alarm was spreading over all this section of the camp. Men were running toward us. We dashed away into the trees.

"Wait—here, take this, Dianne."

We took the drug; ran on through the underbrush, dodging the firelight. The scene expanded. The shouting in the camp faded into a dim muffled roar overhead, and then was gone.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE BLACK AND WHITE FLAGS.

"IT seems so strange, Dianne, our being alone together."

"Strange, Frank?" Her laugh was like the pealing of little fairy bells. "Strange? Why, when we were children we were together nearly all the time."

Six years now since I had been alone with Dianne. She had been my sister then. We were alone now in the abyss—I was very conscious of how alone we were. We sat by a rock, resting. We had found a pool of water. This was our first stopping since we had escaped from Togaro.

We had no food, but we felt that we could get out of the rock fragment to father before the need of it would be serious. We had encountered no Togarites. This vast abyss—these endless mountains, cañons and caverns of rock—seemed able to hold friends and enemies innumerable, and yet never force them together.

We had at first got small enough to escape from the Togarite encampment; had run, cautiously making our size larger so that the running would take us an appreciable distance from the camp. Once away from immediate pursuit, we started our upward journey in earnest.

We had soon found ourselves lost. It was all a strange, desolate, unknown region to me. But Dianne had traveled it before; as we grew larger, the main configurations of the dwindling region became familiar to her. She found a route different from that which the Togarite expedition had proposed using.

Discussing it with Dianne, I found myself puzzled at her confidence in finding her way out and still avoiding the Togarite parties who were ahead of us. Strange physical conditions, those of this size-change traveling! Yet a moment's thought made the matter clear.

Traveling inward—becoming small—the slightest deviation from the true direction would lead the traveler into vast new realms. Countless universes spreading at his feet. There was space here, limitless. In the size we were when upon Mita there was around us in just that single atom countless light-years of astronomical distance. Coming back, we left the atom. It shrank to a microscopical point. We grew larger than the atoms; larger than the molecules.

Space within this fragment of rock which father was guarding was constantly shrinking. Yet even in the abyss of the Togarite camp it was a vast space. I cannot calculate it. But envisaging the distance from one side of the rock fragment to the other, let us call it a thousand miles.

We grew still larger. Soon, to us, there would be only five hundred miles of distance in here. Then one hundred. Then one mile. Then only a few feet, until at last we would emerge and see that all the space had shrunk to the size of our hand.

Thus, coming out, all roads led in very nearly the same direction. There was no solidity to the rock when viewed from the smaller viewpoint; there is, indeed, no solidity to anything. A growing body, avoiding being crushed, would at last emerge, no matter in what direction it went.

Do I make it clear? I hope so.

There was a stage when Dianne and I had found ourselves wandering alone with, let us say, five hundred miles of the abyss around us.

"The only thing," she said, "I want to emerge near the top of the rock. If we went the other way—if we struck the area where the rock lies upon the granite slab—that 'd hold us back."

"But are we going right?"

"Yes—I'm sure of it." She gestured at the dwindling valley in which we were standing, waiting to be large enough to step out of it. "I've seen this before. And that dome-mountain off there—that's familiar. We're not so far from the top."

AT last we stopped, between the drug doses, to rest. We were at the bottom of a vast circular caldron. Tumbled crags strewn in heaps. The opposite rim, some ten

miles away, was dimly visible in the gloom. There were shadows in here now; it seemed that overhead a vague sheen of light was apparent. We were near the top. Soon we would be out. I touched Dianne's hand.

"It seems so strange, our being alone together."

But it was only strange because she was no longer my sister. Just a girl, seated here with me.

She laughed again. "Frank, don't look at me like that." She kissed me. It seemed the kiss of a sister, and I shrank away. It hurt me.

"Frank!" she protested.

"Don't do that."

"Why not?"

"Don't. Oh, Dianne, don't you understand? It's strange to me yet."

"What is?"

"Your not being my sister. I can't get used to it. I don't mean that—I mean—"

I wanted to demand if she still considered me as a brother, but I got tangled up over it. She was looking at me sidewise. It suggested that mocking look she had given Togaro.

"Dianne, don't—"

She turned serious.

"Frank, you're not a bit like you used to be."

"No," I said.

"Well, don't be angry at me. Stop glowering."

I think that I smiled.

"That's better, Frank." Then she turned wholly serious. "We shouldn't sit here talking like this, with what lies ahead of us. But, Frank, look at me." Her slim white arms with the golden robe falling away from them went out to my shoulders; she held me facing her. "Frank."

I stared into the blue pools of her eyes. Misty blue, with the sheen of

starlight. And I read there my answer. All my dreams of all my life brought suddenly to the promise of reality here in the blue starlight of her eyes.

She pushed me away.

"You see, Frank, I'm not so stupid as you think."

"Dianne—" I could find no words. But it rushed over me anew how dear she was. I stammered, "Dianne, I haven't taken care of you. I've let you get into danger."

"What nonsense!"

"I have. But I'll be careful in the future. Take care of you—always. Dianne, there with Togaro by the camp fire you took too great a chance, fighting him that way."

"It worked," she laughed.

"Yes, it worked. But suppose he had killed you!"

SO precious was Dianne to me now, it seemed as though every danger in the world were assailing her, conspiring to snatch her from me.

"Dianne, promise me—whatever lies ahead of us—promise me you'll be careful."

She said solemnly, "Why, of course, Frank."

"Not reckless, Dianne. Don't take any chances. Don't do anything that would—" I checked myself, and added, "Well, I'm going to guard you, Dianne. No harm can come to you."

Her laugh rippled out. "Frank, you are a dear. I don't think we're in danger now."

"And when it's over, Dianne—when the Togarite menace is over and done with—I was wondering, do you think I killed him?"

"No," she said.

"I don't, either." It seemed that I had hit him a glancing blow on the head—probably no more than stunned

him. I wished vehemently that I had killed him.

Dianne said: "His expedition is a one man affair. If Togaro were dead, it would collapse. His revolution collapsed when we caught and banished him years ago. We'll soon be with your father, Frank. He'll know what to do."

"You think we're larger—ahead of all the Togarites now?"

"Yes, I think so."

I did, also. It was imperative that we get out of the rock first, get up there and warn father what was coming. If we did that, the expanding Togaro hordes wouldn't have a chance.

"We'll have to rig up a black and white flag as a signal to father. You remember, Dianne? I told you I'd arranged that with him. But how the deuce can we?"

She surprised me by drawing from her robe a square of white fabric with black stripes upon it.

"Dianne!"

"I found a chance to make it, Frank—on the ship when Togaro sent me to another cabin."

She displayed it proudly. "Is it all right?"

It certainly was. A flag about two feet square. I stood up now and spread it out.

"We'll wave it—like this, Dianne. Father will see it when we're still very small."

I showed her how we'd wave it.

"Frank! Stop!"

Her gaze was off across the dim abyss of the caldron.

"Over there, Frank! Do you see something moving? I do!"

Miles away, partly up the opposite cliffside of the caldron, it seemed that something was moving. The light was very dim, yet distant objects were unnaturally sharp and clear. Something

moving off there. We stared. Then we thought we saw human figures standing on that far-off cliff, and something waving.

"A flag, Frank!"

It seemed a flag. A black and white flag, something like our own, waving at us!

THE space-voyage which Drake, Ahlma, and Alt made from the doomed planet, was very similar to this one I had just taken on the Togaro ship. The Mitans landed in the abyss of rock. A hundred miles, or a thousand, from the Togarite camp? There is no one to judge.

It was a full day, perhaps, after Togaro landed. A similar scene of activity ensued, save that nearly three times as many people were here; unorganized, badly equipped, refugees struggling upward, not bent upon conquest, seeking only safety.

The voyage had been a busy one for Drake. He had tried to organize things. There was not enough food or enough of the expanding drug for this multitude. Drake organized it into smaller divisions, each in charge of one of the Mitan officials.

When they landed, and the ship was hidden, the refugees began moving upward in size, the leader of each party going ahead with food and drugs, expanding them and dealing them out to his people.

It was the same system that Togaro was using. A slow journey upward, stopping at each stage to erect a new encampment.

And immediately upon disembarking, Mitan leaders were sent out as scouts—alert to locate the Togarites, and to avoid them.

In the first encampment Drake sat in consultation with Jain.

"I think, Jain, this is the best we can do. Get partway up—get all the people up to that size—and then wait."

There was room down here to avoid the Togarites. But farther up in the dwindling space a clash would be inevitable.

"You wish to go ahead of us?"

"Yes, with Alt and Ahlma. They know the way. We will take this black and white flag." (Ahlma had made a flag.) "We can travel fast, Jain. We'll go out and see my father. He controls everything up above. The Togarites can't get out—and if we keep away from them, we're safe enough. No use killing any of our Mitan people by fighting down in here."

"But what about us?" Jain demanded with a touch of suspicion.

"I'll come back to you, Jain. Warn my father that this Togarite horde may try to make a rush out, or get out by trickery. Warn him—and make arrangements so that he can distinguish you Mitans from the Togarites. Then, in small parties, we will go out."

"Your world—there are over a hundred thousand of us, Drake. Will your world receive us? We are friendly—but will your earth be large enough?"

Drake laughed. "Never fear, Jain; we'll get you all out of here—and leave the Togarites in here."

It was quite the same plan that Dianne and I were simultaneously forming. To Drake, as to us, haste in getting up to father was paramount.

Drake, Ahlma, and Alt started upon their journey. They went swiftly. Thousands of miles, perhaps, from Dianne and me at the beginning. Like us, they got safely ahead of the Togarites. At one stage they sighted a Togaro party, but managed to avoid

and pass it without being discovered.

The dwindling space near the top brought them in our vicinity. They were standing on the caldron rim, and saw our black and white flag as I tentatively waved it for Dianne. They waved their own.

WE were cautious approaching one another, each suspecting an enemy ruse. But we came together at last.

Reunion! The five of us here, with all the Togarites presumably behind us; and father and the safety of our blessed earth close overhead. It seemed, with Drake and Alt here with me—with Ahlma and Dianne babbling news of what had happened to each other—that all our dangers were at an end. It was an inexpressible relief.

"We'll be up there in an hour, Frank. What luck getting together!"

His arm was around my shoulders. "Thought you were done for, Frank, you and Dianne. Good heavens, what scenes back there!"

We grew out of the caldron into the space above, the huge familiar valley. I remembered it; but it seemed rather darker now than it had been before.

With our flags out, we stood expanding. Above this valley was the upper surface of the rock fragment. Once we got up there to the summit, father would see us. I wondered if he would be on guard. Or Foley? Or the other man—Ransome—whom we employed? It had only been a few days since Alt and I left here. Days? The events which had crowded them made them seem months to my memory.

The valley shrank and closed in upon us. A pit now.

"Drake, shall we climb out? Or wait a little longer?"

It seemed best for us to start climbing. It was no more than a hundred feet up. Easy enough, with us three men to help the girls.

We scrambled up the rocky slope. We were halfway up when it had dwindled so that the upper rim was barely ten feet above us. There was light up there, and vague, blurred shadows of form in the hazy sky.

"Jump, Dianne. Here, I've got you."

We scrambled out of the closing pit, and stood a moment, expanding upon the upper surface. Jagged rock spires were around us, a broken area of crags upon the summit of the rock. A few acres up here, and down over an abyss was the surface of the granite slab.

The scene shrank further, and then the last drug we had taken ceased its action. We stood on a narrow, jagged peak of rock. A slope led down beside us to a broad, undulating plain. It was only ten feet down.

Alt stood with the girls. Drake and I were together, waving our flags. We saw things dimly at first—the brighter light up here confused us.

"Frank, you think he sees us?"

"What is that, off there?"

There was something very strange here! A chill swept over me. Drake was not familiar with the surroundings father and I had prepared for the guarding of the rock, but I was. This seemed a very strange scene now!

Words choked me. I stood clutching Drake.

"What is it, Frank—what's the matter?"

This light overhead was not the light father and I had rigged up! There was no giant microscope up there in the sky.

Vague blurred shapes of a ceiling and wall were up there, and a light—

but not our light in the guarded room of our house at King's Cove!

This vast plain, gleaming dimly rough and undulating in the light—it should have been our granite slab. But it was not!

Realization surged over me with a chilling rush of horror. This was a different room. There were people here; I heard an echoing rumble of their giant voices. But not father, nor Foley nor Ransome!

The rock fragment had been moved, stolen from father and taken somewhere else! These were enemies, guarding the rock upon the top of which we stood fatuously waving our little black and white flags!

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE FIGHT ON THE ROCK SUMMIT.

ALT, who was standing with Dianne and Ahlma, must have realized from my attitude that something was wrong. I stood stammering, clutching at Drake. Then I got it out.

"Hide, Drake! This isn't our room—that's not father up there!"

We swung about, and I shouted, "Alt, back!"

Alt had already drawn the girls into the shelter of an overhanging rock. We crouched for a moment, not daring to move. Had we been seen from above? A blast of poisoned liquid from a spray up there could kill us here instantly. Or a monstrous finger could come down with a swoop and mash us.

Drake murmured, "Shall we take the diminishing drug? Make a run for it, and back?"

Failure. It beat at me. All our plans gone down into defeat. This was defeat—death for us. A retreat into the abyss; but we would meet the To-

garites coming out! And where was father? What had happened up here?

Alt whispered, "We must get back in."

Drake gripped me. "Are you sure, Frank? Father may have changed things around. If we go back in, without knowing—that's the end, Frank! The end for us all; for the Mitans, depending on us. What will we do?"

The girls crouched, silent, white-faced. It was only a moment or so. We never reached a decision—it was forced upon us. From the edge of the rocky slope near at hand a man's head and shoulders appeared! A man about our own size! He was climbing up from the plain upon which the rock lay. A long bar of metal, thin as a sword, was in his teeth.

He was a hatless, bullet-headed Togarite, a heavy-set fellow, naked to the waist, with dark hair matting his thick chest. He saw us! He shouted and others appeared behind him. Four of them altogether.

Of us all, Alt was the one who had most presence of mind. The Togarite shouted at us. Alt understood the words. He shoved the girls lower behind the rock; he snatched my flag, and stood up, waving it. I caught his words to Drake.

"They don't know if we're friends or enemies."

The rock was, as I had feared, out of father's possession. But it was being guarded now by a method wholly different. The giants in the room overhead had doubtless not yet seen us. They were, I guessed, not overly alert, because four of their men in this smaller size were down here watching for any who might come.

Instant, swift impressions. I realized that Togaro was expected. The Togarites were coming. It would be

difficult to tell a friend from an enemy—and so the guards were put into this smaller size.

Alt waved our flag, and shouted something in his own language. The Togarites stood in a group, twenty feet away, regarding us; four of them, with drug belts, and armed with the sword-like bars. They seemed impressed with our flag. They called again to Alt, and again he answered. To us, Alt flung over his shoulder:

"Doubting us, Drake! If I get them over here, leap upon them. They are only four."

We were three. But Drake had an automatic. He said softly, "Yes, Alt! Closer—we must get them all. Then, if we're not seen from above—"

The Togarites were cautiously advancing. Then they must have seen Dianne! Recognized her golden robe perhaps. They stopped, and then with menacing shouts came running at us.

ALT flung down his flag. "Now!" He made a rush, with Drake and me after him. Drake's automatic spat. The leading Togarites stumbled, fell and lay motionless. The others leaped over him. Drake raised his weapon again; but one of the Togarites flung a bar. It struck Drake's arm. The automatic clattered away; Drake and the fellow locked together and went down, rolling on the ground.

The other two rushed at Alt. He met them full. I was close behind him. His fists flew; he caught one of his assailants in the face. But the other struck with the bar. It must have landed upon Alt's head. He crumpled.

I was gripped by the fourth Togarite—the one Alt had hit. His bar missed me. I caught at his arm; held it, tried to wrench away his weapon. We struggled on the uneven ground.

He was a burly fellow. I wound my legs around him, and suddenly he stumbled and fell. I twisted and came down on top, but could not hold him. His lunge heaved me up. I was flung sidewise, but as I scrambled, my hand seized a metal bar which had been dropped. I clung to it.

Then the other Togarite leaped upon me. He had finished with Alt. He jumped upon me as I was trying to rise. I rolled, with the two of them pounding at me. The bars were thin but heavy things. I warded a blow from my head. Then my hand with the bar hit one of the men. He fell away from me.

I was aware of Drake shouting. "Coming, Frank!"

My remaining antagonist had me by the throat. He was half on top of me. Beyond his ugly distorted face I saw Drake rising—and the Togarite under him lay inert.

I was pinned. My breath was stopped. In another moment I would have been unconscious. But Drake came with a leap. He had seized his automatic where it lay on the rocks. The butt of it crashed against the skull of the man over me.

My senses faded, but came instantly back. Drake was pulling the body off me. He helped me up. Around us lay the four Togarites, motionless. Alt was lying here also. And Alt was dying.

Dianne and Ahlma came running forward.

We stood a moment breathless, confused, undecided what to do. The white-faced, trembling girls bent over Alt. The blow on the head had perhaps only stunned him. But there was a sharpened bar of metal now, sticking gruesomely in his side. He lay unconscious; livid, but he was still breathing.

The thing had happened so swiftly! Overhead in some strange, monstrous room, giants were sitting. As Drake and I stood here in the silence, victorious in this fight, but with our dying friend here, the rumble of the talking giants overhead was plainly audible. To them, all this was a tiny combat, fought upon a quarter of an inch of rock surface. They had not yet seen or heard us, not realizing that anything unusual was transpiring on the small chunk of rock at their feet. Ants may fight in deadly combat and the human, whose shoe is their battle ground may be all unaware of them.

I pulled myself together. "Drake, we've got to hide these bodies! Perhaps we can avoid discovery."

There were many recesses here. We dragged and tumbled the bodies out of sight, or at least what we hoped would be out of sight of the people overhead.

Drake panted, "We'll have a few minutes, maybe. But they're likely to discover that their guards are gone."

"**D**RAKE, let's not go back in. We've got to get out, Drake!

Out to the world with these drugs—and with a warning of what is coming."

"And get to father. Oh, Frank—"

He did not finish. Had father been killed?

"We'll get out," I said. "Here, put these vials in your belt, you've got more room." We were despoiling the dead Togarites of their drug supply. We hurried from the last one, back to where Alt lay with Dianne and Ahlma over him. They were in plain sight from above.

"Carry him somewhere, Drake. We mustn't be seen—above everything, not be seen. Is he dead, Dianne?"

She answered, with a surprising hushed calmness, "No, not yet. Our poor friend!"

We lifted him up, as quietly as we could. In a small ravine with a jutting rock above it, we laid him down.

"The best we can do, Drake."

"Yes. Shall we wait?"

Ahlma was kneeling. She looked up. "He seems to be conscious."

We bent over him. His eyelids struggled up. He focused his filming eyes upon Ahlma. He recognized her. And behind her, he recognized Drake. He murmured in English, "I'm—hurt too much, Drake."

"No! You'll be all right. Just close your eyes. Go to sleep, Alt, we'll fix everything."

"Hurt too much. Ahlma—"

She murmured, "Alt. Oh, my dear friend!"

His twitching face, ghastly with the blood drained from it, seemed trying to smile.

"Not—just your friend—because I always loved you, Ahlma. Only now, this hurts too much. I can't—stand it any longer—but Drake will take care of you, Ahlma."

He choked. Then he seemed to sigh, as though amid all the agony and turmoil, rest and peace were coming to him.

The light went from his eyes. He was gone.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE RETURN TO EARTH.

"NOT that way, Frank! Let's get around the back—I think it's a better chance."

We had clambered down the ten feet of jagged rock. We didn't change size—we had to risk it as we were, for to

have got smaller would have made the descent too great. Somehow we were not discovered. We seemed to be on the floor of a room. A stone floor—we saw it as a ridged, uneven rocky plain. Off in the distance was what might have been a table, chairs, and the legs of seated men.

Ahead of us, a quarter of a mile away, was a cliff-like precipice. I figured it to be the wall of the room. It seemed darker off there.

We ran. The rock had a small fence around it—a fence which, compared to the normal room-size, was probably a foot or two high. We darted through its bars. In five minutes, perhaps, we were in the shelter of the bottom of the wall. It was seemingly of rocks and earth, piled and plastered together. It was dank with moisture, but solid to us in this size.

We stood a moment in the shadows here, panting from the run.

"Where do you suppose this is?" Drake demanded. "Can you make anything out of it, Frank?"

We were secure for the moment. It was dark over here. Standing with quiet survey I could imagine that there were three or four men off there in the distance. That this was a room with a single light overhead. No window on this side. The other walls were too far away to be visible.

"The door," said Drake. "That's what we've got to find—got to get out through it."

But where were we? Certainly this was no room in our home. It looked as though it might be a place hastily, amateurishly built. But it was tight. No crevices—no cracks or openings. The bottom of this wall was plastered solid with wet mud. The air down here was dank and heavy with moisture.

Dianne murmured, "Listen! That sounds like water."

A strange, muffled, reverberating roar sounded from some great distance. A giant sea pounding? It seemed like that. My heart sank. Why this could be a place very far from King's Cove. The wild thought came to me—was this an earthly sound, this muffled pounding of the sea?

I said something like that to Drake.

"Nonsense! They've stolen the rock, Frank, and built this hiding place—probably not far from King's Cove. Where could they go?"

Dianne said abruptly, "I think this is all very small—this place they've built down here."

It was a new idea to us. But it seemed probably true. The Togarites would be in hiding. They had stolen the rock, made it small, and built this tiny housing place.

Our escape was still undiscovered. Not far from us was a long, slanting shadow—as though a table perhaps were cutting off the light. We walked until the shadow was upon us. And by the wall along here was a neglected pile of caked mud, large as a house to us. We found an opening like a cave-mouth, and squeezed in.

We were momentarily safe. "You stay here with the girls," I suggested to Drake. "I'll get large enough to see what the place looks like and how we can get out."

A DISCUSSION in the room interrupted us. The rock was visible a quarter of a mile away. A figure was growing upon it, expanding swiftly. A man. He leaped from the rock. We could see him moving in the opposite direction from us, reaching the little fence, climbing over it.

He had shouted. The distant giant shapes had sprung into action. They seemed bending down. There was surprise, but no turmoil.

"Togaro!" murmured Ahlma.

It was Togaro. As he expanded, there was a size when, with the light upon him, we saw him plainly. There had been no guards to challenge him. He had come swiftly out of the rock, and was large enough when he first shouted to enable the men in the room to recognize him. He was standing off there now, growing to their size. We could hear the rumble of their voices.

It changed our plans. The fact that the guards were missing would now be discovered.

"We can't stay here," said Drake. "If they suspect us, they'll begin searching."

Nor could we run the miles along the walls of this room, hoping to find an open door. We decided we would have to dare a slightly larger size. We stood in the comparative darkness beside this cake of mud and grew—

The room, in a moment, had dwindled. We huddled against its wall. We knew that at any moment we might be discovered, but we had to take the risk. It was a small, windowless cell to its other occupants, though still gigantic to us.

Four men, and Togaro, stood by a table of stone. There was a closed door in the opposite wall. Two men stood by it. A light now sprang over it, so that the room over there was brightly illumined.

Dianne suddenly whispered, "I can understand a little of what they're saying. Ahlma, you know the language better."

Ahlma heard them. "Togaro is saying his first party is coming out now."

They were already coming! The rock seemed much closer to us now, and smaller. Tiny figures showed on its summit. They leaped down, they stood expanding.

It was at once a dismaying and a welcome diversion. The missing guards were forgotten in the turmoil of the arriving Togarites. A hundred or more of them came. The room was in confusion. They tramped about while we shrank again into our niche. They grew large, and in parties of ten, were checked through the door, passing under the light to the darkness outside.

The turmoil made it easier for us. We got around the wall, near to the door. It was a long march, for near the end when we were sure of our direction, we shrank again to a smaller size, and kept close against the wall so that we might not be trampled.

The Togarites were pouring now from the rock. This was the arrival of the first thousand. They seemed so formidable as they grew gigantic and jammed the room! Giant hordes, arriving here on earth! The conquest had begun!

IT made us realize anew that with the world harried by these giants, possession of the drug was of vital importance. The drugs were Togaro's chief weapons. But we four had them also. If we could get out of here—get quickly to the authorities and deliver the drugs—it might be the difference between defeat and victory for the world.

We may have stood there an hour. The arriving Togarites poured into the room; they marched through the doorway in a steady stream.

But we did not dare try to slip through. The light was bright, and there were two guards with gaze al-

ways upon the floor. From where we lurked we could see outside: a dim vista of blurred, luminous darkness and crowding giant figures. There was a babble of rumbling voices, both outside and in here.

The wind from the moving giants occasionally swept in a gale about us. We were standing now almost at the doorway edge, in a shadow from the body of one of the guards.

An hour passed.

Then came the chance we had felt must come at last. The bodies of the Togarites we had killed on the rock summit were discovered! A group of the arriving people carried them down. Togaro had been moving about the room. His voice rang out with commands.

Ahlma translated: "He says, 'Close the door!' No more people are to come now from the rock! Oh, Drake, they're going to search for us! They know now that we are here!"

The guards sprang to the sliding door. But that act momentarily took their gaze from the floor. We were, to them, a few inches high. We were desperate. The door slid closed; but we had made a wild dash and gone through!

We found ourselves outside, in what seemed an outdoor darkness. A void, with a sheen of distant silver light far overhead. Giants tramping about. We dashed for a great jagged porous column. It was wood. We hid in one of its cave cells—a broken niche in its side. There was no search going on out here for us. The giants were tramping about, moving away.

Presently we dared to increase our size again, when the space out here seemed cleared momentarily of the tramping figures. Of all the size-change we ever experienced, I think

that this was now the most surprising. The giants in the distance seemed also growing. We could hear them, but soon realized that another wall was between us and them. We were, for the moment, alone.

We had taken only a taste of the enlarging drug.

"Where are we?" exclaimed Drake. "How small are we?"

THE pounding of the distant sea had been louder out here. But now, as we grew, it shrank until presently it was a murmur. Not a roar, far away—but a murmur, near at hand. The gentle lapping of water, close somewhere here.

And we found a tiny, mound-like house of sand and mud shrinking at our feet. It was sheltered by an overhanging arch of rock. The room from which we had escaped! It dwindled and was gone into smallness.

A rush of madness swept me as I saw that tiny mound. A kick of the toe of my shoe would crush it. Kill Togaro and all his men in there. But the madness passed. For all I knew, father might be in there. And the rock certainly was down in there. If I stamped, that tiny grain of rock would

be forever lost. And a hundred thousand Mitau refugees were in it, waiting for Drake to return to them with help!

Other walls closed in around us. The giants were obviously outside of them. A floor became apparent—a floor of earth and sand, and near by there was a vast spread of uneven wood. As we grew, it shrank to planking. A void of darkness was beyond it. No, not darkness! A patch of silver sheen. Water, off there. Water, with moonlight on it; water, lapping gently under this planking on which we were now standing.

Dawning recognition was coming to us. The rough boards; walls; this ceiling close over us, with timbered beams; this archway, with shining water beyond it—it was the interior of our own boathouse on the shore of King's Cove!

It was night—a calm, placid night of moonlight on the water. The boathouse was empty, save for ourselves as at last, in a normal size to earth, we stood in a corner.

Our dory was gone. The slip of water here was vacant. Outside the boathouse we heard the throng of Togarites tramping about the cove!

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.



Blue Tiger of Tibet

UNTIL a Chinese hunter brought a skin to the American consul in Hankow a few years ago, no one believed the story of the "blue tiger." The skin was not actually blue, but of a bluish-gray roan like the color of some of the scrub cows once common in this country. According to the Chinese of Tibet this blue tiger is a devil incarnate, which raids the flocks, attacks the water buffalo, and even enters villages to attack men, women, and children.

Scientists say that the blue tinge of the hair is a freak color phase similar to the black color of silver foxes, but there is no other explanation unless in the centuries ago there was once a strain of blue tigers ranging the forests of the "roof of the world."

Wyman Sidney Smith.

A Flaw in the Ring

Bill and Jim had no business of their own—but how they could butt into other people's!

By JOHN H. THOMPSON

IT was a car of expensive make, one of those plush upholstered affairs which are designed to carry seven passengers, but which seldom are seen carrying anybody but the owner and his chauffeur. This particular car, however, was rather seedy. It needed a fresh coat of paint and a general overhauling. We couldn't see the interior, but, judging by the outside, the plush upholstery probably was shot pretty full of holes and the cut glass orchid holder probably was as leaky as a discarded saucepan in a deserted house.

It swung up to the curb in the narrow side street and stopped about thirty feet from where Bill and I were standing at the corner. The man at the wheel, immaculate and pink jowled, glanced up and down the street, hesitated for a minute and then shut off the engine and climbed out. Again he looked up and down the street. There were not many signs of life—two or three taxis parked in a dreary row some distance away, several urchins playing in the gutter and a couple of men standing at the next corner.

The driver banged the door of the limousine, crossed the sidewalk to a doorway leading into the office building which cast its shadow over the side street, and disappeared from view.

BILL and I resumed our discussion of the important question of where we should spend our remaining dollar for dinners.

"Look!" exclaimed Bill suddenly.

The two men who had been standing at the other corner had hurried down the street and stopped beside the parked car. They furtively opened the door, sprang inside and a second later we heard the whir of the starter.

"They're stealing the car," ejaculated Bill. There was the purr of a motor and a grinding of gears.

The next instant Bill was shoving me ahead of him into one of the erstwhile deserted taxicabs and urging a bewildered taxi driver to "Drive like blazes and follow that car!"

"Why go out of our way hunting trouble?" I protested, but Bill paid no more attention than a society dame would pay to the wife of a garbage man.

The taxi driver was obeying instructions, and before my stricken eyes the taximeter tore into our dinner fund, eating it up, until we came to an abrupt halt with the total at a figure which would leave us the price of one cup of coffee.

"The car turned into that garage," said the driver laconically as he jammed on his brakes and jerked a stubby finger in the general direction of a rusted, battered garage sign halfway down the block.

Bill glanced at the 95 on the meter dial and reluctantly handed over our dollar.

"This is only a dollar bill," declared the driver indignantly.

"What did you think it was? A thousand dollars?" countered Bill.

"Thanks for the nickel tip for the service you got." The driver leaned forward and pulled the gear shift lever. "Cheap skates!" he added as the cab plunged ahead.

"Who told him he could keep that nickel?" demanded Bill angrily.

"You needn't look at me," I protested. "This is your party. All I have to do is to go hungry because of your cursed foolishness."

"Foolishness?" chuckled Bill. "There'll be a reward tacked on this car that'll make a dollar look as insignificant as a toy balloon at an aviation meet."

We crept up to the garage, a shabby, deserted-looking building, and tried to peer inside; but the windows were covered with green paint and we might just as well have tried to peer through the brick walls themselves. Bill tried cautiously to open the door. It was locked.

"I'm going to get a cop," declared Bill. "Those two guys swiped that car and have got it inside that building."

We located a policeman, and in response to the heavy rapping of his club the door of the garage was opened by a rough-looking guy who eyed us with mingled anger and apprehension.

"Where's that car that just came in here?" demanded the officer.

The rough-looking guy coughed nervously.

"There hasn't been a car come into this place to-day," he declared.

THE place certainly seemed deserted. Bill and I hadn't actually seen the car enter the building. Perhaps the taxi driver had been kidding

us. I sighed dismally. One of these days Bill's accursed propensity for interfering in other people's affairs was going to land us in a room with whitewash on the walls and bars on the doors.

"What you got upstairs?" demanded the officer. From overhead came the sound of hammering.

"I don't know. Another fellow runs some kind of a repair shop up there." The rough-looking guy could not conceal his nervousness.

"Come on up." The officer led the way toward the elevator at the rear.

The rough-looking guy fumbled around with a switch, but the elevator did not move. He palpably was stalling for time. The officer brushed him brusquely aside and himself manipulated the switch. An instant later the elevator was creeping upward.

On the upper floor were two rows of cars, all stripped of license plates and in various stages of alteration. One or two were being repainted, while others were undergoing even more extensive changes. In one corner of the big room a worker was desperately pounding on a piece of metal. Two other men were in sight. Bill and I recognized them as the pair who had taken the car. Any doubts as to their honesty were dispelled when they rushed pell-mell toward the stairway as the officer came into view. His drawn pistol stopped their flight.

The layout looked none too good to me—four criminals against one policeman and a pair of old drifters. The chances that the coroner would have a busy afternoon seemed depressingly bright.

Much to our relief, though, none of the four put up any fight. They probably figured that Bill and I were plainclothes men and were armed.

That officer sure had his nerve with

him. He quickly had the four lined up with their faces to the wall.

Investigation disclosed that the bird over in the corner had been hammering a pair of license plates to pieces. It obviously had been a hurry up job, however, and he had not made sufficient progress to obliterate the numbers, though he worked until the officer pressed the muzzle of a pistol to his neck.

"There's the car they just swiped," chuckled Bill, pointing to a limousine which, like its companions, was now minus its identifying plates.

"We've been looking for this nest of automobile thieves for a month," grinned the cop. "And I guess the search is over. Call up headquarters for me—322—and tell the sergeant to send the wagon." He indicated a telephone over near the work bench. Bill obeyed directions.

Ten minutes later we were at headquarters and it didn't take the headquarters men very long to uncover the records of the quartet of prisoners—records which tied them up definitely with a ring that had been swindling the insurance companies. It was a big capture, so big that the commissioner himself was called in. He was so pleased with our share in the round-up that he handed us each a ten-dollar bill from his own pocket.

"Fifteen cars stolen within a month," he explained sociably. "Just dropped completely out of sight. These crooks drove 'em into that garage, repainted 'em, altered 'em, eliminated the engine and body numbers, and then drove 'em out and sold 'em. The insurance companies were raising a hol-

ler. "I don't blame them, either. They'll be delighted to learn that we've got the whole ring. If every citizen was as

alert as you two, the police would be able to do far more effective work."

Bill puffed up like an old-time trouper answering his tenth curtain call. I had to admit that his investment of a dollar in a taxi fare seemed to be bearing fruit. A dollar is only a dollar, but twenty dollars represents enough coffee to float a coast guard destroyer.

BUT the trouble with Bill is that he's never satisfied. As soon as we got out of headquarters, instead of heading for the nearest restaurant as any reasonable man would have done, he proposed that we visit the owner of the stolen car and collect a reward from him.

"Anybody who gets his stolen car back as easily as that should be glad to pay a reward," Bill pointed out.

It sounded O K.

We blew around to the building on the side street and with the assistance of the elevator man succeeded in identifying the pink-jowled individual who had parked the shabby limousine. He was a broker up on the tenth floor.

The instant we were ushered into his office we recognized him. He eyed us a bit fishily. I didn't like his looks. I knew that Bill didn't either, but Bill is one of those birds who don't believe in beating around the bush.

"You're the gent whose car was taken, out here a little while ago?" Bill said.

It flashed through my mind that perhaps the pink-jowled one was not yet aware even that his car had been stolen. He didn't seem surprised, though, so I decided that the police probably had got in touch with him.

"Well, what about it?" he snapped.

"It's over in a garage on Twentieth Street," said Bill.

"Well, what if it is?" demanded the

owner testily. "Isn't that where it's supposed to be?" He sprang to his feet. His eyes flashed with anger. "I'm getting sick and tired of the way you fellows are rushing me," he snapped, shaking his fist at us angrily. "You know as well as I do that it takes me a week or two to get the money from the insurance company, but still you come around to collect your share the instant each frame-up is put through. I haven't even had Gus report the theft of this car yet, and here you are already trying to stick the hooks into me for your share. Nobody even knows yet that the car has been stolen. Hell!" He flopped back into his chair with a snort of disgust.

"You don't get one cent out of me now—not one red cent." He pounded the desk with his fist. "You'll get yours when I get mine, and not a minute sooner. I'll have Gus report the theft right away to the police and to the insurance company—so long as you've got the car safely in the garage. And we'll collect as soon as we can. Clear out of here, now."

He turned and busied himself with some papers on his desk.

Bill looked at me, speechless, and I at him.

Then without further ado we turned and headed for the door.

"You might tell Jack and Bob for me," sneered the pink-jowled one as we opened the door, "that I said it was like casting pearls before swine to give idiots like them a chance to work in on a good game."

We went out, softly closing the door behind us.

Bill seemed a bit dazed.

"Jack and Bob are probably two of those bozos in the car-stealing ring that the police caught," I ventured.

"Probably," agreed Bill.

"You going down to the lock-up to give 'em the message about pearls?" I grinned.

"No, but speaking of jewelry," chuckled Bill, "I'm going to stop at headquarters and tip off the commissioner as to where he can get the diamond that's missing from that ring we found for them."

THE END.



Hamlet and the Sidewheel Steamer

TELEGRAPH HILL, newest site for big San Francisco apartment hotels, was given its name in the decade following the gold rush of '49 when, from its top, arrival of ships through the Golden Gate was signaled by a watchman to the city below. The telegraph of those days was a semaphore whose arms wigwagged the information. The device using electricity, then just coming into use, was designated as the magnetic telegraph.

A history of California written in 1855 tells of a theatrical troupe representing Shakespearean drama. Hamlet, following the stage convention of the day, waved his arms and declaimed, "What means this, my Lord?" From the gallery came the shouted deciphering of his gestures by a boy who had mastered the semaphore code: "Sidewheel steamer!"

Leon Rowland.



Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint



"MOON UP"

THEODORE ROSCOE has a few words to say about his story "Moon Up," which appears in this issue—and which we think certainly establishes him as a story-teller of the first rank. Mr. Roscoe:

Perhaps you ARGOSY readers would be interested in a note concerning "Moon Up." Also I'd like to grab the bull by the golden horns and say a word in my own defense before some friend boomerangs certain parts of the story at my person.

In the first place there isn't any valley of Houghlan Ra. Granted. But there are a lot of spots like it scattered about the Orient. A good share of the atmosphere was handed me by my mother, who was born in North India and spoke Hindee before she could speak English. The Mardo of the yarn was a house boy of hers; and an uncanny old rascal he was. He used to pull off a lot of hoorah about his finger tips and some of it wasn't so hoorah. My mother lived in India some score of years and this Mardo served her a decade, and the fellow was a pretty weird boy. Could read omens and guess fortunes with an accuracy to make one uncomfortable. (I might add that his finger tips were uncannily adept at closing over articles of value and he left the family's service under suspicion.)

Now a little native girl in a neighboring town near the family's mountain home managed to disappear. The villagers and my grandfather hunted high and low, concluding she had been lunched upon by a vagrant tiger. And (with apologies to Ripley's "Believe It Or Not") they found her remains—earrings, toe rings, beads and some other aids to indigestion in *exactly the same locale* as were found the explanations to my story. If you don't believe it I can't exhibit the objects as the naturalist in my story did, but I'll meet you in front of the Brasserie Terminus in Algiers next fall and fight for the family's honor. Because it's true!

So there aren't any gavials twenty-two feet long, eh? Well, there was a gavial skeleton in the Jardin des Plantes in Paris measuring

twenty-one feet seven inches, and any naturalist can tell you how long he'd be with his coat on. Too long to toy with.

And as for the moon, I can only apologize for it as Reven Staffard did in his story. Go out into your backyard and study it some fine night. I've watched it a good many times rise in the African sky; and east of Suez they say it's even brighter. But take a good look at it above your own elm tree in your own yard. It's like a woman. Mysterious. You can never see the other side. No reason for it being there and yet you want it there. And it's the darnedest thing you've ever seen. Just the agent to make a good man disappear. 'Alikum salaam!

THEODORE ROSCOE.

INCIDENTALLY, we have been receiving some mighty fine letters about Roscoe's tales lately. For example:

Albany, N. Y.

I have been a reader of ARGOSY for over a year now and I want to say this: I think your magazine is just about the best fiction publication on the news-stands to-day, regardless of price. I have read many magazines from cover to cover, magazines containing all sorts of fiction imaginable, but none can compare with ARGOSY, and that at the paltry sum of ten cents.

Among your best writers are, I think, Theodore Roscoe, Fred MacIsaac, W. Wirt, F. V. W. Mason, Hulbert Footner and Slater La-Master. The "impossible" stories by Ray Cummings and others are also splendid.

Although I have seldom seen Theodore Roscoe's writings praised by a reader in "Argonotes," I think he is just about the best short story writer on your present staff.

J. C. T.

PUBLICATION DATES

MANY of you have been asking for the publication dates of the ARGOSY novels being published this fall by the A. C. McClurg Co. These dates are as follows:

"The Planet of Peril," by Otis Adelbert Kline, October 1st.

"The Phantom in the Rainbow," by Slater LaMaster, October 8th.

"The Man who Mastered Time," by Ray Cummings, October 22nd.

The price of each of these books is two dollars. They may be secured from your local book dealer or from the publishers, whose address is 333 East Ontario St., Chicago, Ill.

"PARIS MADNESS" didn't make much of a hit with Mr. Brayley:

Chicago, Ill.

After reading the ARGOSY for twelve years I think it's time "I've stuck my finger in the pie" and give my opinion. I am very well pleased with the variety published. Slater LaMaster, Richard Barry and Fred MacIsaac are my favorites. I'm surprised at Fred MacIsaac letting "Paris Madness" slip through his fingers and getting published. It was terrible, even though the school ma'ams were from my home town, Muskegon, Mich.

Give us some more *Mme. Storey* novels. They are surely interesting.

R. E. BRAYLEY.

BUT it did not seem to disturb Mr. Luther:

Scranton, Pa.

I just began reading your magazine and, believe it or not, it sure is great. I get a whole flock of magazines, but I always read the ARGOSY first.

Let's have some more stories like "Jolly Flies the Roger," "The Planet of Peril" (a great story), "Swords on the North Sea," "Gray Eyes of Peril," "Dummy Dollars," "Monkey Eyes," "Paradise Island," "Paris Madness," "The Gravy Train" and "How About It, Mike?" They were sure fine reading.

Give my best wishes to Fred MacIsaac, Clarence Woodbury, J. Allan Dunn, Lieut. John Hopper, Otis Adelbert Kline, W. Wirt, Joseph Ivers Lawrence, Richard A. Martinsen, Gene Cunningham, F. V. W. Mason and Theodore Roscoe and all the rest; they sure can write!

HARRY LUTHER

ANOTHER call for more of W. Wirt's Chinese tales:

Portsmouth, Ohio.

I have been a reader of ARGOSY for five years. Have read it from coast to coast, and

from the Argentine to the Arctic, and wish to say that it is the best all-around book published.

Have been here for eight weeks and I don't know what I would have done without my old standby, the ARGOSY.

Please give us some more stories by the author of "War Lord of Many Swordsmen."

Keep up the *good work*.

DON E. SHERRINGTON.

NOW for a few favorite authors and stories:

Haverhill, Mass.

Although I have only been reading the ARGOSY for six months, I consider it the best of its kind on the market for its price and quality of stories. The kind I like best are mystery and "impossible."

"The Radio Flyers" and "The Haunted Yacht Club" were A-1. I am glad to learn that "The Radio Flyers'" author, Ralph Milne Farley, is going to write a sequel. Some of the stories I liked best were "The Planet of Peril," "Monkey Eyes," "Paris Madness," "Arabian Nights of 1929," and "The Mental Marvel" and "Jolly Flies the Roger."

For authors I like Seltzer, MacIsaac, F. V. W. Mason and Kline best.

JOHN MAHONEY.

Jesup, Ga.

Just a few words from an ARGOSY reader of several years' standing who considers your magazine in a class by itself, as far as interesting fiction is concerned.

My acquaintance with ARGOSY began back in 1918 when Max Brand was giving your readers his immortal *Whistlin' Dan Barry* stories, and to this day I still welcome a Max Brand story with joy.

Other authors whose stories I have enjoyed are: G. W. Ogden, James B. Hendryx, Edgar Rice Burroughs, W. C. Tuttle, Kenneth Perkins and a host of others too numerous to mention.

Now for the types of stories which best appeals to me: adventure, mystery, humorous, fantastic and war yarns. Personally I do not care for the sport story, but wouldn't deny them to others.

G. B. POPWELL.

A COUPLE of kicks are sandwiched in with these favorites:

Rose Hill, Iowa.

The ARGOSY is improving all the time, and is a far better magazine than it was two years ago. A. Merritt, Fred MacIsaac, Joseph Ivers Lawrence, Loring Brent and Talbot Mundy are my favorites. "The Phantom in the Rainbow" was a great story.

YOUR CHOICE COUPON

Editor, ARGOSY,
280 Broadway, N. Y. C., N. Y.

The stories I like best in this issue of the magazine are as follows:

1.....

2.....

3.....

4.....

5.....

I did not like.....
because.....

Name.....

Street.....

City..... State.....

10-12

W. Wirt's stories are too bloody and Ray Cummings's stories are losing their originality by their sameness in plot. Always a revolution as soon as the *Earthmen* arrive who invariably save the princess.

I am in favor of a photograph of each author of serials. "Paris Madness," "The Gravy Train," "Dummy Dollars" and "The Black Friar" are the best of recent novelettes.

HOWARD FRANCE.

THIS reader is a bit more satisfied, however:

Rock Island, Ill.

My father has been a reader of your book for fifteen years and, believe me or not, we all think the ARGOSY is *the* book.

On Monday some one has to go two miles to the only book store who puts your book out that early in the week for his book, and if we don't go it is just too bad for some one.

Do not change your stories as they are the best there are, and why quarrel over a book when it only costs the small price of ten cents?

Best of luck to all of your authors as they are in a class by themselves, and also good luck to the best magazine in this wide world.

PAUL THOMPSON



Looking Ahead!

One of the most romantic periods in American history provides the setting for

THE HAWK OF HAZARD

A Stirring Adventure Novel

By OSCAR J. FRIEND

The Mississippi Valley just before the Civil War—when stalwart pioneers rubbed elbows with proud Southern gentlemen and assorted rascallions from the Eastern seaboard. It is a vivid novel—one you will not want to miss.

THE CRACK-UP KID

A Complete Novelette

of one of to-day's most adventurous professions—news-reel flying

By Frederick C. Davis

THE DANCE OF THE SEVEN VEILS

The Foreign Legion in Action

A Great Short Story

By Theodore Roscoe

COMING TO YOU IN THE ARGOSY OF OCTOBER 19th



there clawing frantically
was ... "the THING!"

ONLY a moment before, in the dead of night, she had been awakened by a strange scraping noise. Her heart thumping wildly she looked fearfully around the room, but at first could see nothing. Suddenly her heart stopped beating—for there at the window was the

THING—awful, inhuman, its two hands clawing frantically at the glass!

She shook in terror—for she knew only too well what had happened to others! Now *she* was at its mercy!

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Banishes Old-Style Can Openers to the Scrap Heap and BRINGS AGENTS \$5 to \$12 IN AN HOUR

WOMEN universally detest the old-style can opener. Yet in every home in the land cans are being opened with it, often several times a day. Imagine how thankfully they welcome this new method—this automatic way of doing their most distasteful job. With the Speedo can opening machine you can just put the can in the machine, turn the handle, and almost instantly the job is done.

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You undoubtedly know what a nasty, dangerous job it is to open cans with the old-fashioned can opener. You have to hack your way along slowly—ripping a jagged furrow around the edge. Next thing you know, the can opener slips. Good night! You've torn a hole in your finger. As liable as not it will get infected and stay sore a long time. Perhaps even your life will be endangered from blood poisoning!

You may be lucky enough to get the can open without cutting yourself. But there's still the fact to consider that the ragged edge of tin left around the top makes it almost impossible to pour out all of the food. Yet now, all this trouble, waste and danger is ended. No wonder salesmen everywhere are finding this invention a truly revolutionary money maker!

AGENTS!



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SPARE TIME Big Money Spare Time
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Get my free test offer while the territory you want is still open—I'll hold it for you while you make the test. I'll send you all the facts about \$75 to \$150 a week. I'll also tell you about another fast selling item that brings you two profits on every call. All you risk is a 2c stamp—so grab your pencil and shoot me the coupon right now.

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